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SUPERNORMAL PHENOMENA IN  
CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY<sup>1</sup>

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THIS paper is concerned with the point of intersection of two interests which have been with me through most of my working life—curiosity about the religious ideas of classical antiquity and curiosity about those oddities of human experience which form the subject-matter of psychical research or, to use a more pretentious word, ‘parapsychology’. I am not the first to combine these two interests. Among the pioneers who in 1882 founded the Society for Psychical Research the leading spirit was a classical scholar, Frederic Myers; and important contributions were made to the new studies by scholars like Andrew Lang, Mrs A. W. Verrall and Professor Gilbert Murray. In these circumstances a question naturally presented itself: did the contemporary phenomena which were now for the first time subjected to serious examination reflect any fresh light upon the field of ancient religious beliefs and practices? The question was raised by Myers in his essay on Greek Oracles<sup>2</sup> and by Lang in a paper on ‘Ancient Spiritualism’;<sup>3</sup> both writers answered it with a confident—perhaps too confident—affirmative. But since their day there has been little scholarly attempt to approach the problems of ancient religion from this particular angle. Jeune and obviously secondhand ancient material, torn from its context of thought and interpreted in the light of the author’s prepossessions, continues to figure in the various popular and semipopular ‘histories of occultism’ and the like. On the other hand serious students of ancient beliefs about

<sup>1</sup> Part I of this paper incorporates with some additions an essay on ‘Telepathy and Clairvoyance in Classical Antiquity’ published in *Greek Poetry and Life, Essays presented to Gilbert Murray* (1936) and reprinted in *Journal of Parapsychology* 10 (1946) 290 ff. Parts II and III are substantially new.

<sup>2</sup> In *Hellenica*, ed. Evelyn Abbott (1880); reprinted in Myers’ *Classical Essays* (1883).

<sup>3</sup> In his *Cock Lane and Common Sense* (1894).

the supernormal rarely<sup>1</sup> betray any knowledge of, or interest in, their modern counterparts.

Yet the Myers-Lang method may perhaps have a modest utility both for the classical scholar and for the psychical researcher. By comparing certain ancient beliefs with their present-day analogues the classical scholar can, I think, hope to understand better the underlying experience out of which the beliefs grew. Some similarities—for example, in the popular tales about haunted houses<sup>2</sup>—may be due to the influence of literary or oral tradition; but there are other cases where one seems driven to assume the independent occurrence of the same type of psychological event. And the differences can be no less instructive than the similarities: they illustrate the way in which the interpretation of such events is coloured by the belief-patterns current in a particular society.

For the psychical researcher too there is in my opinion something to be learnt from this sort of enquiry. I do not mean that it can directly confirm the authenticity of phenomena whose occurrence to-day is a matter of dispute. The scientific study of the preconceptions, illusions, false memories and other factors which tend to vitiate testimony, and the insistence upon such documentation as shall minimize their influence, hardly began before the latter half of the nineteenth century. In antiquity the importance of first-hand documents in any branch of history was notoriously little appreciated; and first-hand ancient accounts of supernormal experiences are of extreme rarity. Indirectly, however, something can be gained by the application of two critical principles which I will now state.

The first is a negative principle: namely, that if a particular supernormal phenomenon, alleged to occur spontaneously among civilised people in recent times, is *not* attested at any other time and place of which we have adequate knowledge, the presumption is thereby increased that it does not occur as alleged, unless clear

<sup>1</sup> There are exceptions. A. Delatte in *La Catoptromancie grecque et ses dérivés* made legitimate and convincing use of modern experiments in 'scrying' to elucidate certain features of the ancient mantic practice (see below, p. 216 ff.). And Martin Nilsson wrote to me in 1945 'I am persuaded that the so-called parapsychical phenomena played a very great part in late Greek paganism and are essential for understanding it rightly.' Cf. also the just remarks of Friedrich Pfister, *Bursians Jahresbericht*, Supp.-Band 229 (1930) 307 f.

<sup>2</sup> The tradition that earthbound spirits haunt their place of death or of burial is as old as Plato (*Phaedo* 81 CD) and doubtless far older. It persisted throughout antiquity and survived the advent of Christianity (cf. e.g. Origen, *c. Cels.* vii. 5; Lactantius, *div. inst.* ii. 2. 6). The prototypical tale is that told by the younger Pliny (*Epist.* 7. 27. 4 ff.) of a haunted house at Athens and reproduced by Lucian (*Philopseudes* 30 f.) with a different location and a few additional horrors. For other haunted houses see Plutarch *apud* schol. Eur. *Alc.* 1128 (the Brazen House at Sparta); Plutarch, *Cimon* 1 (house at Chaeronea, said still to produce 'alarming sights and sounds' in Plutarch's day); and Suetonius, *Caligula* 59.

reason can be shown why it remained so long unnoticed. Thus, if no case of telepathy had ever been recorded before (let us say) 1850, this would, I suggest, throw very considerable doubt on the actuality of its occurrence since that date. This is of course a principle to be applied with due caution, since it involves an argument from silence, whose strength will vary with the completeness of our documentation and also with the nature of the phenomenon. But it has some force as applied, for example, to 'poltergeist' phenomena. Disturbances of the sort popularly attributed to these rowdy, plate-throwing spirits are something not easily overlooked. Yet I have never come across a recognizable pre-Christian tale of a poltergeist, as distinct from the traditional 'haunt'.<sup>1</sup>

My second canon might be called the principle of variation. Suppose a phenomenon X to be accepted as occurring in modern Europe and America under conditions ABC and only under these; if it be recorded as occurring at another time or place under conditions BCD, then there is a presumption that neither the presence of A nor the absence of D is necessary to its occurrence. In such a case, since the conditions are partially identical, we have some assurance that the earlier report is not just a piece of free invention. And if that is so, the element of difference can be highly instructive. For it can show us which of the conditions are causally connected with the phenomenon and which are merely reflections of a contemporary pattern of belief.

I must, however, emphasise the need for especial caution in applying these critical principles to classical antiquity. In the first place, although the surviving ancient literature on the subject is in the sum-total fairly considerable, we know that it is only a fraction of what once existed. The Stoic school, in particular, accumulated extensive case-books: Chrysippus wrote two books on divination, another on oracles—in which, says Cicero, he collected innumerable responses, 'all with ample authority and testimony'—and

<sup>1</sup> The ability to move objects without contact ('psychokinesis' in the modern jargon) is in certain hagiographical legends attributed to demons (see below, p. 233 f.); but they can scarcely qualify as poltergeists, since their feats are provoked by an exorcist and are non-recurrent. Non-recurrence seems also to disqualify such cases as Suetonius' tale of the man who slept in a holy place and found himself ejected bed and all 'by a sudden occult force' (*vit. Augusti* 6). More interesting, though indirect and inconclusive, is the evidence of Andocides i. 130, to which Mr G. J. Toomer first called my attention: 'Hipponicus keeps an evil spirit (*aliterion*) in his house, who upsets his table (*trapeza*).' Nothing supernatural is intended here: the 'evil spirit' in question is Hipponicus' spend-thrift son, and the word *trapeza* is introduced for the sake of a pun on its secondary meaning 'bank' (Hipponicus was a banker). But the joke would have additional point if the speaker's audience were familiar with stories of real poltergeists.

yet another on dreams; Diogenes of Seleucia, Antipater and Poseidonius all wrote on similar topics<sup>1</sup>. All these works are lost. In these circumstances the argument from silence is more than usually perilous. And secondly, it is a commonplace of psychical research that supernormal or quasi-supernormal experiences, more than any other class of human happenings, have the chameleon quality: from the background of belief against which they emerge they take so deep a colour, not only in tradition but in the experient consciousness itself, that their identity is hard to isolate. Consider, for example, the difficulty of making anything intelligible out of the seventeenth-century witch trials, relatively recent and relatively well documented as these are: seen through the medium of a universally accepted belief-pattern, the underlying psychological and objective data are consistently distorted, often beyond recognition. The ancient belief-patterns, though less blindingly uniform, carry similar possibilities of distortion; and their influence is the harder to allow for in proportion as they are less familiar to the modern imagination.

## I. TELEPATHY AND CLAIRVOYANCE

I begin my enquiry with the two classes of phenomena which are to-day most widely accepted as genuine by critical students, viz. telepathy, defined as 'the communication of impressions of any kind from one mind to another, independently of the recognized channels of sense', and clairvoyance, defined as 'the faculty or act of perceiving, as though visually, with some coincidental truth, some distant scene'.<sup>2</sup> It must be said at the outset that these are modern, not ancient categories. There is no ancient word for telepathy or clairvoyance. So far as they were recognized at all, they were embraced in the comprehensive notion of 'divination' (*mantike*) along with retrocognition and precognition. The typical diviner is Homer's Kalchas, 'who knew things past, present and to come'.<sup>3</sup> (In practice, as we shall see, the stress fell overwhelmingly on the last,<sup>4</sup> since divination was popularly valued for its

<sup>1</sup> Cicero, *de div.* i. 6; i. 37; i. 39. Other references in Zeller, *Philosophie der Griechen*<sup>5</sup> III. i. 345 ff.

<sup>2</sup> I take these definitions from the glossary to Myers' *Human Personality*.

<sup>3</sup> *Iliad* i. 70. So too the dreams bestowed by the original Earth oracle at Delphi revealed 'the first things and the things thereafter and all that was to be' (Eur. *I.T.* 1264). But 'divination' is often used in a narrower sense, with exclusive reference to the future.

<sup>4</sup> Legendary seers sometimes exhibit supernormal knowledge of past events as evidence that their visions of the future will prove true (Prometheus, Aesch. *P.V.* 824-6; Cassandra, Aesch. *Agam.* 1194 ff.; Iarchas, Philostratus, *vit. Apollonii* 3. 16; cf. *Gospel of John* 4. 17-19). The implied assumption is that retrocognition and precognition are manifestations of the same power.

utility, not for its theoretical interest, and his own future usually concerned the enquirer more nearly than other people's present or past.) The ancients subdivided divination, not according to the content supernormally apprehended, but according to the method of apprehension. They distinguished 'technical' or ominal from 'natural' or intuitive divination.<sup>1</sup> Cicero quotes as examples of the former class divining from entrails, the interpretation of prodigies and of lightning, augury, astrology, and divination by lots; to the latter he assigns divination in dreams and in ecstatic states.

In general the ominal species of divination are of little concern to the psychical researcher. But he will examine with interest the doctrine of intuitive divination, since some of the best modern evidence for extrasensory perception has been obtained with percipients in abnormal states (hypnosis and 'mediumistic' trance), and well-authenticated cases of coincidental dreams are abundant in modern records. What he will chiefly find, however, will be not a theory but a religious belief-pattern—or rather, perhaps, one belief-pattern superimposed on the remains of another. Halliday<sup>2</sup> may have been right in regarding the Greek diviner as a shrunken medicine-man, whose gift must at one time have been considered innate, as an element or aspect of his *mana*. But already by Homer's day ominal divination has passed under the control of religion. The diviner, in Halliday's phrase, 'holds his gift from God': Kalchas practises an art 'granted him by Apollo,'<sup>3</sup> and all the great diviners of legend have a comparable status. Later, we find the two branches of intuitive divination similarly organized in the interests of the Olympians: in the main, Apollo takes over the patronage of trance mediumship and his son Asclepius that of the veridical dream, although older powers like Hecate and the Corybantes are still held responsible in popular belief for the more alarming and disorderly sort of manifestations. The supernormal, canalised and controlled, becomes the sensible evidence of the supernatural, and its authenticity is in turn guaranteed by its divine patrons: the Stoics spoke for the mass of men when they proclaimed the mutual interdependence of belief in the gods and belief in divination.<sup>4</sup>

So close an association with religious orthodoxy was naturally unfavourable to the growth of anything like critical study: it explains in particular the paucity of attempts at experimental investigation—what was of God was felt to be better left alone. Never-

<sup>1</sup> Cicero, *de div.* i. 12. The distinction is as old as Plato (*Phaedrus* 244 B ff.).

<sup>2</sup> W. R. Halliday, *Greek Divination* (1913), chap. 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Iliad* i. 172. Dreams too, in Homer as in later belief, are often though not always sent to the dreamer by a god.

<sup>4</sup> Cicero, *de div.* i. 10.

theless, it is hardly correct to say, as Edwyn Bevan did,<sup>1</sup> that 'the theory of telepathy and thought transference had not occurred to antiquity.' At least one ancient account of divination—that of Democritus, about 400 B.C.—is founded on the notion of a physically mediated telepathy; and there are approaches to the idea in later writers.

Democritus' treatise *On Images*<sup>2</sup> is lost, but an outline of the doctrine which concerns us is preserved by Plutarch.<sup>3</sup> We learn that Democritus, like his successor Epicurus, explained dreams in general by the penetration through the pores of the dreamer's body of the 'images' which are continually emitted by objects of all sorts and especially by living persons; he also held (and in this, says Plutarch, Epicurus did not follow him) that the images carry representations of the mental activities, the thoughts, characters, and emotions of the persons who originated them, 'and thus charged, they have the effect of living agents: by their impact they communicate and transmit to the recipients the opinions, thoughts, and impulses of their senders, when they reach their goal with the images intact and undistorted.' The degree of distortion which the images suffer in transit depends partly on the weather, partly on the frequency of emission and on their initial velocity: 'those which leap out from persons in an excited and inflamed condition yield, owing to their high frequency and rapid transit, especially vivid and significant representations.' This is definitely a theory of telepathy (and clairvoyance, if we extend it to inanimate 'senders'), distinct from the complementary doctrine of *divine* images which served to explain precognition.<sup>4</sup> The remark that people in a state of excitement make, to use the modern term, the best telepathic 'agents' is deserving of notice, since it is confirmed by modern observations: a strikingly large proportion of telepathic dreams, hallucinations and impressions are reported as having occurred when the assumed agent was experiencing some physical or mental crisis.<sup>5</sup>

The theory as presented in this passage is concerned only with dreams, but it is probable that its scope was actually wider. Plutarch tells us elsewhere<sup>6</sup> that Democritus explained 'the evil eye' on the same principle: the action at a distance is mediated

<sup>1</sup> *Sibyls and Seers* (1928) 163.

<sup>2</sup> Diels-Kranz, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* 68 B 10.

<sup>3</sup> *Q. Conv.* VIII. x. 2, 734 F (=Diels-Kranz, *Vors.* 68 A 77). For discussion cf. A. Delatte, *Les conceptions de l'enthousiasme chez les philosophes présocratiques* 46 ff.; W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* II. 482.

<sup>4</sup> Sextus Emp. *adv. math.* ix. 19 (=Vors. 68 B 166).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Gurney, Myers & Podmore, *Phantasms of the Living* i. 229; Ian Stevenson, *Proc. Amer. Soc. for Psychical Research* 29 (1970) 17-22.

<sup>6</sup> *Q. Conv.* V. vii. 6 (=Vors. 68 A 77).

by these same images, charged with a hostile mental content, which 'remain persistently attached to the person victimized, and thus disturb and injure both body and mind.' These effects are apparently produced continuously, and not merely in sleep. And Democritus is also credited with the belief that 'animals, wise men and gods' possess a sixth sense—not further defined, but apparently linked with the apprehension of impinging images.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, if we are to believe Antisthenes,<sup>2</sup> Democritus actually undertook an experimental study of images (whether divine or ghostly in origin), sometimes isolating himself for the purpose in desert places and cemeteries. Was his choice of desert places dictated by a realization of the difficulty which still confronts the student of 'spirit' phenomena—the difficulty of *excluding* telepathy from the living?

An important further step towards the naturalization of the supernatural was taken by Aristotle, who rejected oracular divination altogether<sup>3</sup> and ascribed the intuitive variety not to divine intervention but (in his youth at least) to an innate capacity of the human mind. In his early work *On Philosophy* (now lost) he is reported as saying that 'the mind recovers its true nature during sleep';<sup>4</sup> in his *Eudemean Ethics* he associates the capacity for veridical dreaming with the 'melancholic' temperament which enables certain individuals to perceive, intuitively and irrationally, 'both the future and the present.'<sup>5</sup> But with advancing years he grew more cautious, though not less interested, as appears from his later essay *On divination in sleep*. Since, however, in that essay he was primarily<sup>5a</sup> concerned with precognition, it

<sup>1</sup> Aetios IV. 10. 4 (=Vors. 68 A 116, cf. A 79.) Discussed by Guthrie, op. cit. II, 449–51.

<sup>2</sup> Diog. Laert. ix. 38.

<sup>3</sup> Plutarch, *Plac. phil.* V. 1; cf. Cicero, *de div.* i. 72.

<sup>4</sup> *Fragm.* 10 Rose<sup>3</sup> = 12a Ross. Here Aristotle is still under the influence of Plato (cf. *Rep.* 572 A).

<sup>5</sup> *Eth. Eud.* VIII. ii. 23, 1248a 38 ff. The 'melancholic' is a person who suffers from an excess of black bile in his system, according to the teaching of the Coan school of medicine, and for that reason tends to be emotionally unstable. We should call him a 'manic-depressive'. The view that such people have an especial gift of divination appears in later medical writers (Aretaeus, *morb. chron.* i. 5; Alexander of Tralles i. 511, 591 Puschmann), but this pathological explanation was indignantly rejected by the Stoics (Cicero, *de div.* i. 81). Aristotle mentions it again in his essay 'On Divination in Sleep' (*de div. p. somn.* 464 a 32), but his tone there is more sceptical. Cf. W. Jaeger, *Aristotle* (Eng. trans. 1934) 240 f., 333 f.

<sup>5a</sup> Primarily but not exclusively. Like other ancient writers Aristotle treats telepathy and precognition as manifestations of the same faculty. Cf. the reference at 463 b 1 to dreams about 'a naval battle or (other) distant events' and at 464 a 1 to dreams of events which are 'outside the limits (of normal explanation) in respect of time, place or importance'. (The category of 'importance' covers, I suppose, public events like battles, of which the dreamer could have no normal knowledge.)

will be more convenient to consider it under that heading.

The connection between divination and religion, which Aristotle had endeavoured to dispense with, was reaffirmed by the Stoics. Poseidonius (about 135-50 B.C.) held that veridical dreams were due, if not to direct intercourse with the gods, then to the community of human with divine reason, or to reading the thoughts of the 'immortal souls' who throng the air beneath the moon.<sup>1</sup> For the existence of a common reason in God and man the Stoics could claim the authority of Heraclitus (about 500 B.C.), and Calcidius<sup>2</sup> seems to say that Heraclitus explained in this way 'visions of unknown places and apparitions of the living and the dead'; but it is hard to tell how much of this passage is genuine Heraclitus and how much is Stoic amplification. Among such bold speculations the humbler psycho-physical problem of telepathy, which Democritus had stated and attempted to solve, naturally enough fell into the background. But there are some indications that Poseidonius' theory of divination (which has come down to us only in a confused and fragmentary form) included, along with much else, the notion of a physically mediated telepathy, if not between the living, at least between the living and the 'souls in the air.' Plutarch,<sup>3</sup> discussing the 'daemonion' of Socrates, propounds the view that spiritual beings in the act of thinking set up vibrations in the air which enable other spiritual beings, and also certain abnormally sensitive men, to apprehend their thoughts. Such vibrations impinge upon us continually, but they can reach consciousness only when the mind is sufficiently calm to detect them, that is, as a rule only in sleep. Reinhardt<sup>4</sup> was probably right in thinking that Plutarch is here making use of Poseidonian ideas. A similar contrast between normal human perception on the one hand and daemonic and mediumistic intuition on the other was found by Cicero in Poseidonius: 'as the minds of gods have community of feeling without eyes, ears or tongue . . . so human minds when set free by sleep, or in detached states of excited derangement, perceive things which minds involved with the body cannot see.'<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Poseidonius in Cicero, *de div.* i. 64. How far the theory of 'souls in the air' originated with Poseidonius is uncertain. Something rather like it appears in Alexander Polyhistor's summary of Pythagorean doctrine (Diog. Laert. viii. 32), but his reliability as a witness to early Pythagorean teaching is open to much doubt (cf. Festugière, *Rev. Ét. Gr.* 58 [1945] 1 ff.; W. Burkert, *Weisheit und Wissenschaft* 46 f.).

<sup>2</sup> Calcidius, in *Tim.* cap. 251 (= *Vors.* 22 A 20). The theory of divination which he attributes to Heraclitus appears to be in fact that of Poseidonius (K. Reinhardt, *Kosmos und Sympathie* 401).

<sup>3</sup> *Gen. Socr.* 20, 589 B.

<sup>4</sup> *Poseidonios* 464 ff.; *Kosmos u. Sympathie* 288 f.; Pauly-Wissowa s.v. 'Poseidonios' 802 f.

<sup>5</sup> *de div.* i. 129.



Like the modern vibration theories of telepathy, the speculations we have been considering postulate a physical carrier for the mental content communicated. The plausible analogy of wireless telephony was not yet available; but experience offered other seeming analogues. In popular belief every kind of action at a distance was explained by occult emanations proceeding from persons or objects. The most striking and indisputable case of such action was the influence of the magnet upon iron,<sup>1</sup> which had impressed the imagination of Thales, had aroused the scientific interest of Democritus and had been used by Plato to illustrate the communication of poetic inspiration.<sup>2</sup> Quintus Cicero argues that it is no less mysterious and no less certain than divination.<sup>3</sup> And there were other generally accepted examples: do not the phases of the moon work tidal changes in our blood and affect the growth of all living things?<sup>4</sup> and does not 'the evil eye' imply a secret emanation from the human eye?<sup>5</sup> Such reflections were generalized in the Stoic and Neoplatonic doctrine of occult 'sympathies', which when combined with the notion of a world-soul issued in something like a reinstatement, on a higher philosophical level, of the primitive conception of the world as a magical unity.

For the Neoplatonist the linkage has become nonphysical.<sup>6</sup> The world, says Plotinus,<sup>7</sup> is like one great animal, and its 'sympathy' abolishes distance; distant members may affect each other while the intervening portions of the organism are unaffected, 'for like parts may be discontinuous yet have sympathy in virtue of their likeness, so that the action of an element spatially isolated cannot fail to reach its remote counterpart.' This principle provides a rationale both of prayer and of telergic magic, as Plotinus did not fail to point out (*Enn.* IV. iv. 40-1; IV. ix. 3). It provides also a rationale of what we call telepathy; but to this, so far as I can see, Plotinus nowhere makes an explicit allusion, though certain passages have been interpreted in this sense: he gets no nearer than the remark that *discarnate* souls may be supposed to communicate mutually without speech.<sup>8</sup> Nor did his successors,

<sup>1</sup> Pliny, *N.H.* xxxvi. 126.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *de anima* 405 a 19; *Vors.* 68 A 165 (cf. Delatte, *Conceptions de l'enthousiasme* 59 ff.); Plato, *Ion* 533 D ff. Other passages about magnetism will be found in J. Röhr, *Philol. Supp.* xvii, i. 92-5.

<sup>3</sup> Cicero, *de div.* i. 86.

<sup>4</sup> Pliny, *N.H.* ii. 102.

<sup>5</sup> Plut. *Q. Conv.* V. vii. 2.

<sup>6</sup> On the difference between the Neoplatonic and the Poseidonian conception of 'sympathy' see Reinhardt, *Kosmos u. Sympathie* 248 f., 252 ff.

<sup>7</sup> *Enn.* IV. iv. 32.

<sup>8</sup> *Enn.* IV. iii. 18. The statement at IV. ix. 3 that 'a word softly spoken can influence a distant object and procure obedience from what is vastly remote in space' looks at first sight like a reference to telepathy (G. W. Lambert, *Proc. S.P.R.* 36 [1927] 398). But the wording suggests rather the compulsive power of prayer or the telergic magic which in Plotinus' day was taken seriously. See now Harder's note on the passage.

for all their interest in occult phenomena and in the relationship between mind and body, bestow much attention on telepathy. Outside of metaphysics, Neoplatonism created no new patterns of belief: its concern was to defend old ones by giving them a metaphysical justification.

As the ancients had no name for telepathy or clairvoyance, so they practised no systematic observation of cases. The scattered examples which have come down to us are for the most part casually recorded and exceedingly ill evidenced. I propose briefly to review some of them, taking first those associated with oracles.

The most familiar of these is the famous story of the test applied by Croesus, King of Lydia in the sixth century B.C., to Delphi and other oracles—the earliest example of what would to-day be called an experiment in long-distance telepathy. If Herodotus<sup>1</sup> is to be believed, Croesus sent messengers to seven of the best oracles, who on the same day were to put the same question to each oracle—‘What is the King of Lydia doing to-day?’ The messengers themselves did not know the answer. Five of the oracles failed the test; a sixth, that of Amphiaraos, was highly commended for a near miss; but Delphi alone came up with the correct reply, that the King of Lydia was doing a bit of cooking—he was boiling a lamb and a tortoise in a copper pot. The story may be apocryphal—as rationalist historians have naturally assumed<sup>2</sup>—but the experiment as described was well devised: Croesus had taken adequate precautions to exclude both normal leakage and chance coincidence. The point to notice, however, is that neither he nor Herodotus knew that it was a *telepathic* experiment: they thought he was testing the alleged omniscience of various foreign gods or heroes.

Croesus’ example was not followed for many centuries: the pious Xenophon considered it blasphemous,<sup>3</sup> and no doubt that view was widely shared. But it does not stand quite alone. We have Macrobius’ story<sup>4</sup> about the Emperor Trajan, who sealed up a blank set of tablets and sent it to the oracle of Jupiter Helio-politanus at Baalbek, an oracle which specialized in reading sealed letters without opening them. Trajan’s missive was returned to him with the seal intact, accompanied by a second letter containing the god’s answer. When the latter was opened, it in turn proved

<sup>1</sup> i. 47.

<sup>2</sup> But see H. Klees, *Eigenart des griechischen Glaubens an Orakel und Seher* (Tübinger Beitr. 43, 1965 91.8), who argues from the unhellenic behaviour attributed throughout to Croesus that the stories of his dealings with Delphi must have an historical foundation. As W. G. Forrest puts it (*Gnomon* 38, 1966, 629), ‘parts may have been distorted or overlaid by Delphic propaganda, but the framework is Lydian.’

<sup>3</sup> *Cyrop.* vii. 2. 17.

<sup>4</sup> *Saturn.* i. 23. 14 f.

to contain a blank sheet of papyrus. The sceptic need not hesitate to believe this story, for the useful art of reading sealed letters appears to have been as closely studied in antiquity as in our own day. While Greco-Egyptian magic provided specialist spells for the purpose,<sup>1</sup> simpler ways of performing the feat were likewise known. The third-century Christian writer Hippolytus includes in his curious collection of recipes for parlour tricks (derived, as Wellmann<sup>2</sup> has shown, from earlier pagan sources) several methods of taking a cast of a seal, which when set constitutes a duplicate die; and Alexander of Abonoteichus is accused by Lucian of 'working an oracle' by duplicating seals in this fashion. Lucian also knows of the still simpler plan of removing the seal intact with hot needles and later replacing it, and he mentions that yet other devices to the same end have been described by his friend Celsus in his treatise against the magicians.<sup>3</sup> We have here the most obvious explanation both of the Baalbek performance and of the obscure procedure involving a sealed vessel (analogous to modern 'slate-writing'?) which appears to have been practised at the Apolline oracle of Koroëpe in Thessaly about 100 B.C.<sup>4</sup> Hence also, perhaps, if it ever took place, the successful experiment of that Governor of Cilicia who wrote privily on his tablets the question 'Shall I sacrifice to thee a white bull or a black?', sealed them, and sent them by a freedman to the oracle of Mopsus; the freedman, sleeping in the temple, claimed to have heard in a dream the one word 'black'.<sup>5</sup>

The occasion of Croesus' test is apparently not the only one on which the Pythia succeeded in 'understanding the dumb and hearing the unspoken word': Plutarch, whose evidence has special weight in relation to Delphi,<sup>6</sup> says that 'she is accustomed to deliver certain oracles instantly, even before the question is put.'<sup>7</sup> A like claim is made by Tacitus for Claros: the priest on consulta-

<sup>1</sup> *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (henceforth referred to as *P.G.M.*) iii. 371; v. 301.

<sup>2</sup> *Die Φυσικά* des Bolos Demokritos (Abh. Preuss. Akad. 1928) 64 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Lucian, *Alex.* 21.

<sup>4</sup> *SIG* 1157. The inscription is unfortunately illegible at a critical point. For other interpretations see Louis Robert, *Hellenica* V (1948) 16 ff., and H. W. Parke, *The Oracles of Zeus* (1967) 104 ff. Against the view adopted in the text the latter argues that it makes the Koroëpeans too naively credulous. But what was thought good enough for (if not by) the Emperor Trajan may well have satisfied the local patriotism of the city fathers in a small Greek country town. Cruder 'miracles' still command the implicit faith of thousands in the Mediterranean lands.

<sup>5</sup> Plut. *def. orac.* 45. The story seems to be a temple legend: the speaker in Plutarch's dialogue says he heard it when he visited the oracle in question. Cf. Lucian, *Philops.* 38.

<sup>6</sup> Plutarch held a priesthood for life at the oracle.

<sup>7</sup> *de garrulitate* 20. Herodotus claims the oracles given to Lycurgus and Eëtion as instances of this (i. 65. 2; v. 92 β).

tion days would merely inquire the names of the clients present and then, after retiring to a sacred grotto and there drinking the water of a certain fountain, would give appropriate replies in verse to their unspoken questions.<sup>1</sup> To assess the evidential value of such general statements is hardly possible, but it is unnecessary either to dismiss them as pure fabrications<sup>2</sup> or to assume that the managers of the oracles employed an army of private inquiry agents. If we may judge by the number of living persons who claim to have received relevant 'messages' at anonymous sittings with 'mediums' previously unknown to them, there is nothing impossible about the feat, whether we explain it by thought-reading, by the will to believe, or by some blend of the two.

Oracles were occasionally consulted, as clairvoyants are to-day, concerning the whereabouts of missing objects: thus at Dodona one Agis 'consults Zeus Naos and Dione about the rugs and pillows which he has lost: did some outside person steal them?'<sup>3</sup> At oracles where 'incubation' (sleeping in the temple) was practised such questions might be answered in dreams.<sup>4</sup> Three narratives of clairvoyant dreams of this type are included in the Epidaurian temple record. In the first case (no. 24 Herzog) a boy named Aristocritus, from Halieis, has dived (or fallen) into the sea from a cliff, failed to effect a landing, and disappeared. His father sleeps in the temple, and in a dream Asclepius leads him to a certain spot and shows him that his son is there. Returning home, he identifies the spot, cuts a passage through the rock, and finds the boy on the seventh day (presumably dead, though the record refrains from saying so). In the second story (no. 46) a woman is looking for a treasure concealed by her late husband: the god tells her in a dream that 'the treasure will be lying within the lion at noon in the month of Thargelion,' and the hoard is eventually found to be buried at the spot where the shadow of a certain stone lion falls at noon at the date mentioned. No. 63 also concerns a missing sum of money, a deposit at Leucas which there is difficulty in tracing: Asclepius in a dream introduces the depositor to the ghost of the deceased trustee, 'who revealed the spot, and told him that if he came to Leucas he would get the gold from his (the trustee's) sons.' To these may be added a case of a different kind, no. 21, where the same (medical) dream is independently dreamt about the same

<sup>1</sup> *Annals* ii. 54.

<sup>2</sup> This is what Farnell does (*Cults* iv. 225). But the passage which he quotes from Ovid (*Fasti* i. 19) does not disprove Tacitus' statement: it merely shows that consultation by letter was admissible in lieu of personal attendance. On the Pythia as 'medium' see below, p. 225 f.

<sup>3</sup> H. W. Parke, *The Oracles of Zeus* 272.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the dream of Sophocles in which Heracles revealed the name of the thief who had stolen some of the temple plate (Cicero, *de div.* i. 54).

time by a woman at Epidaurus and her daughter (the patient) at Sparta.

Probably few persons to-day would be satisfied with the crude view that the Epidaurian record is a wholesale forgery deliberately produced by the priests, or would assume with some of the earlier commentators that the patients were drugged, or hypnotized, or mistook waking for sleeping and a priest in fancy dress for the divine Healer: an explanation is to be sought rather in the analogy of medieval and modern religious faith-healing and the so-called 'medical clairvoyance' of hysterical subjects.<sup>1</sup> But the record is not a first-hand document: Herzog has shown in an admirable study<sup>2</sup> that it is based partly on genuine votive tablets dedicated by patients—which might be elaborated and expanded in the process of incorporation<sup>3</sup>—partly on a temple tradition which had attracted to itself miracle-stories from many sources. Of the stories quoted in the previous paragraph, no. 46 is, as Blinkenberg and Herzog have pointed out, a widely diffused folk-tale which has attached itself to the tradition. On the other hand no. 24 looks like a genuine case: the names and local details are precise, and in fiction the boy would have been found alive. Herzog produces medieval German parallels, and one may add that the employment of clairvoyants to discover missing corpses is common to-day on the Continent. It is not necessary to regard the incident as supernormal: a subconscious inference from indications observed during the earlier search might well emerge in the symbolic form of the veridical dream. No. 21 has a parallel in Pap. Oxy. 1381<sup>4</sup> (second century A.D.), where the Egyptian healing god Imouthes appears simultaneously to the patient's mother in a waking vision and to the patient in a dream. In both stories the narrator's intention is evidently to exclude an interpretation of the appearance as merely subjective; in both, if we take them as fact, the operation of a common will to healing in parent and child may provide a normal explanation.

<sup>1</sup> On medical clairvoyance see Myers, *Human Personality*, Appendix V.a. Augustine records an interesting and typical case, *de Gen. ad litt.* xii. 17. On faith-healing in modern Greece see J. C. Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion* 60 ff. Text and translation of the Epidaurian record will be found in Emma & Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius* (1945) I. 221 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Die Wunderheilungen von Epidauros* (*Philologus*, Supplementband 22, Heft iii). See also Edelstein's *Asclepius*, II. 139–80; and my *Greeks and the Irrational* 110–16, 127–30. Artemidorus thought that no man of sense would put faith in such records (4. 22, p. 255. 13 ff. Pack).

<sup>3</sup> No. 1 is a clear case of this (Herzog, p. 71).

<sup>4</sup> Re-edited by Manteuffel, *de opusculis graecis Aegypti . . . collectis* (Warsaw, 1930); translated and discussed by Nock, *Conversion* 86 ff. For another story of a dream experienced simultaneously by two persons see Livy, viii. 6; for modern cases, *Journ. S.P.R.* iv. 220 f.; vii. 104 ff.; ix. 331 f., etc.

Finally, no. 63 is explained by Herzog as a folk-tale of the Honest Dead, which must originally have been associated with a necromantic dream-oracle, the mediation of Asclepius being a later addition. He brings it into connection with the story of Periander and Melissa (Hdt. v. 92); with a somewhat similar legend about the Christian Bishop Spyridon (Sozomen i. 12; Photius, *Bibl. cod.* 256, etc.); with Varro's<sup>1</sup> story of his uncle Corfidius, who when lying in a state of coma became aware supernormally of his brother's death, at or near the moment of its occurrence, and also of the place where the latter had secretly buried some gold; and lastly with Augustine's<sup>2</sup> story of the young man to whom his father revealed in a dream the whereabouts of a missing receipt. It may, I think, be doubted whether all these tales stand on the same footing. The story of Periander belongs unmistakably to folklore, and that of Spyridon to hagiology; but one's uncle is a less likely hero for a purely fictitious romance. We may suspect the 'buried gold' as a secondary elaboration derived from a folk-motive, but the remainder of Varro's narrative belongs to a type for which abundant first-hand modern evidence exists, the dream or vision (usually of a near relative) coinciding with the death of the person seen. The experience of Corfidius is curiously like that attributed to the eighteenth-century American Quaker Thomas Say, who when lying comatose and supposedly dead had a clairvoyant apprehension of the deaths of no less than three other persons and of the circumstances attending the end of one of them.<sup>3</sup> In the Epidaurian case, too, secondary elaboration may have been at work on a real dream: that the depositor should dream of finding the trustee dead and recovering his money from the sons, is entirely natural; the only supernormal element lies in the vague words 'he revealed the spot,' and one must remember that the instability of dream-memories renders them peculiarly liable to unconscious distortion in the light of waking belief. As for Augustine's story, it is second-hand and anonymous, though related to Augustine *pro certo*. It has, however, a striking modern parallel in the 'Chaffin Will case' (*Proc. S.P.R.* xxxvi. 517 ff.), which has figured in an American court of law and is certainly not a folk-tale. It may be added that Augustine, with characteristic caution and acumen, warns us against assuming too hastily that the source of the supernormal apprehension in such cases is necessarily the deceased person.

<sup>1</sup> *Apud* Pliny, *N.H.* vii. 177; reproduced in Granius Licinianus xxviii, p. 7 Flemisch.

<sup>2</sup> *de cura pro mortuis* 11 (13).

<sup>3</sup> *Journ. S.P.R.* xiii. 87 ff. The story was written down many years later by Say's son. For this and some other parallels I am indebted to an unpublished thesis by Mr F. T. Walton.

If the anecdotes which circulated in the waiting-rooms of oracles carry as a group no very strong conviction of authenticity, it would be futile to seek a possible basis of fact for the stories of extra-sensory perception which appear in hagiographical romances. We need not linger over the strange powers which already in Aristotle's day were attributed to Pythagoras, the prototype of Greek miracle-workers;<sup>1</sup> or over the claim of Hermotimus of Clazomenae to be regarded as the first practitioner of 'travelling clairvoyance';<sup>2</sup> or over the sensational feats ascribed to Apollonius of Tyana<sup>3</sup> and St Benedict<sup>4</sup> by their respective biographers. When material of this kind is excluded, the remaining evidence of telepathy or clairvoyance by private individuals is curiously scanty.<sup>5</sup> And apart from the tradition about Democritus there is very little trace, save at the crude level of the magical papyri, of any attempt at experiment.

In particular, the type of spontaneous case which is most abundant in modern records, viz. dreams or hallucinations coinciding with the death or physical peril of the person seen, is rare in antiquity, though not unknown. If we exclude such things as Apollonius' highly questionable vision of the death of Domitian,<sup>6</sup> it is represented, so far as my knowledge goes, only or chiefly by the above-mentioned Corfidius story, by the vision of Sosipatra in Eunapius,<sup>7</sup> and by the well-known tale of the wicked innkeeper.<sup>8</sup> In that tale two travellers arrive at Megara, where one puts up at an inn while the other lodges with an acquaintance. The second man dreams that his fellow-traveller is in danger of being assassinated by the innkeeper. He springs up to help him, but on realising that it was a dream goes back to bed. He then has a second dream in which his friend tells him that he has been murdered and bids him go at dawn to one of the town gates and intercept a dung cart, concealed in which he will find the corpse. He does so, the corpse is found and the innkeeper is brought to justice. Here the first dream can plausibly be explained by tele-

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, fragm. 191 Rose<sup>3</sup> (Ross, *Fragmenta Selecta* p. 130 ff.). Most recently discussed by W. Burkert, *Weisheit und Wissenschaft* 117 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Pliny, *N.H.* vii. 53; Plut. *gen. Socr.* 22; Tert. *de anima* 44; etc. Lucian, *Musc. Enc.* 7, calls his story a fable.

<sup>3</sup> Philostratus, *vit. Apoll.* iv. 12; v. 24; viii. 26 f.

<sup>4</sup> Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, Book II *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> Among the 95 allegedly veridical dreams personally collected by Artemidorus from his contemporaries and reported in his Fifth Book I can find only two (5. 17 and 5.50) which lend themselves to a telepathic explanation. But of course he was looking for instances of precognition, not of telepathy.

<sup>6</sup> Dio Cassius 67. 18; Philostratus, *vit. Apoll.* viii. 26 ff. Suetonius knows nothing of the story.

<sup>7</sup> *Vitae sophistarum* p. 470 Boissonade.

<sup>8</sup> Chrysippus fragm. 1205 Arnim, *apud* Suid. s.v. τιμωροῦντος; Cicero, *de div.* i. 57; Val. Max. i. 7, ext. 3.

pathy from the dying man. Whether the second should be explained by telepathy from the murderer, by clairvoyance on the part of the dreamer, by the continued action of the murdered man's spirit, or by the tendency to make a good story better, I will not attempt to decide.<sup>1</sup> It is perhaps enough to say that it is one of those nameless and dateless incidents, painfully familiar to the modern investigator, which are copied, with improvements, from one textbook into another;<sup>2</sup> the version quoted by Suidas from Chrysippus differs widely from Cicero's, to which in turn Valerius Maximus adds a few finishing touches.

More impressive is the case of Sosipatra, a Neoplatonist blue-stocking, who in the midst of addressing a meeting of philosophers abruptly fell silent, and then proceeded to describe an accident which was happening somewhere in the country (we must assume, at the same moment) to a relative and admirer of hers. "What is this? My kinsman Philometor riding in a carriage! The carriage has been overturned in a rough place! His legs are in danger! Oh, the servants have got him out unharmed, except for cuts on the elbows and hands—not dangerous ones. And now he is being carried on a stretcher while he makes a lot of fuss." That is what she said, and it was so. And so everybody knew that Sosipatra was omnipresent and, as the philosophers say about the gods, a witness of all that happens.' It is a pity that this incident rests solely on the authority of Eunapius,<sup>3</sup> a notorious amateur of the miraculous.

There are also a few cases where the issue of a battle is said to have been supernormally apprehended by a distant person before the news could travel by ordinary means: besides the rumour at Mycale of the victory at Plataea (Hdt. ix. 100), we have the augural divination reported by Livy<sup>4</sup> to have been performed by his friend Gaius Cornelius at Patavium on the day of the battle of Pharsalus (this is transformed by Aulus Gellius<sup>5</sup> into an impressive case of visual clairvoyance); and the auditory hallucination by which John Hyrcanus was apprised of his sons' victory over Antiochus Cyzicenus.<sup>6</sup> The type seems to have been a recognized one by

<sup>1</sup> The question is gravely discussed by de Boismont, *On Hallucinations* 176 f.; Flammarion, *Haunted Houses* 44 ff.; de Vesme, *Hist. du spiritualisme expérimental* i. 349 f.; etc.

<sup>2</sup> According to Cicero it was 'continually quoted by the Stoics'.

<sup>3</sup> *Vitae sophistarum*, p. 470 Boissonade. This was not the only occasion when Sosipatra (whom Eunapius may have known in his youth) displayed her telepathic powers: at the age of nine she described to her father the incidents of a journey he had just taken 'as though she had been in the driver's seat with him' (ibid. p. 467).

<sup>4</sup> *Apud*. Plut. *Caesar* 47.

<sup>5</sup> *Noct. Att.* xv. 18.

<sup>6</sup> Josephus, *Ant. Jud.* xiii. 282 f.



Aristotle's day: his example of an external event apprehended in a veridical dream is a sea-fight.<sup>1</sup>

The most careful and sober descriptions of supernormal occurrences which have come down to us from antiquity are those furnished by Augustine, who deserves a more honorable place in the history of psychical research than any other thinker between Aristotle and Kant.<sup>2</sup> One of his cases has already been quoted. Extrasensory perception may be involved in the following also:<sup>3</sup>

1. A case of apparent telepathic 'rapport' between an hysterical patient and a priest who was in the habit of visiting him, being the only person who could keep him quiet during his attacks and persuade him to take nourishment.<sup>4</sup> The priest's home was twelve miles distant from the patient's, and the latter would habitually recognize the moment at which the priest was setting out to visit him, and would describe exactly all the stages of his journey, saying 'Now he has got so far! now he has reached the farm! now he is coming up to the house!' The hysteric was naturally supposed by his friends to be possessed by an unclean spirit, and the spirit got the credit for these 'monitions of approach'; but Augustine prudently observes that 'he may have been merely mad, and the possession an inference from the powers which he displayed.' He eventually recovered, and his uncanny intuitions then ceased. The account has a genuine ring; but in Augustine's day it would not be easy to measure time-coincidences closely, and we do not know how far normal inference might enable the subject to forecast the priest's visits.

<sup>1</sup> *de div. per somn.* 463 a 2.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. W. Montgomery, 'St Augustine's attitude to psychic phenomena,' *Hibbert Journal* xxv. 92 ff.; J. de Vooght, 'Les miracles dans la vie de S. Augustin,' *Recherches de Théol. ancienne et médiévale* xi (1939) 5 ff.; Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* 413-18.

<sup>3</sup> I have not included the celebrated story of the two Curmas, *de cura pro mortuis* 12 (15). Although Augustine obtained the percipient's own story in this case, as well as corroborative testimony from other people, he must have been hoaxed by his informants; for the same tale appears a couple of centuries earlier in Lucian's *Philopseudes*, 25 (and a couple of centuries later in Pope Gregory's *Dialogues*, iv. 36). The names are different in each version, but the central incident is the same in all, and in all *the victim is a smith*. (A variant which makes him a cobbler occurs still earlier, Plut. *de anima*, fragm. 1 *apud* Eus. *Praep. Evang.* xi. 36.) I can agree neither with Reitzenstein (*Hell. Wundererzählungen* 6), who thinks that Augustine made the story contemporary by a 'literary artifice', nor with Rose (*Proc. Camb. Philol. Soc.* 1926, 13 f.), who defends its genuineness.

<sup>4</sup> *de Genesi ad litteram* xii. 17 (Migne xxxiv. 467 ff.). Augustine calls the patient's malady 'fever' as well as 'insanity'. But the special influence which the priest exercised over him during the attacks points to an illness of mental rather than physical character. For modern parallels see *Phantasms of the Living* i. 251 ff. and J. L. Nevius, *Demon Possession & Allied Themes* 33 ff.

2. An unnamed person, whose truthfulness Augustine guarantees, told him that one night before going to rest he thought he saw a philosopher of his acquaintance come in and expound certain questions about Plato which on a previous occasion he had refused to answer. It appeared later that the philosopher had *dreamed* that night that he came to his friend's house and answered the questions.<sup>1</sup> A few well-authenticated cases of this 'reciprocal' type have been recorded in modern times;<sup>2</sup> but modern phantasms are not reported as holding lengthy conversations with their hosts.

3. Finally, we have some interesting cases of extrasensory perception by a Carthaginian diviner named Albicerius which were witnessed by Augustine and his friends.<sup>3</sup> Augustine, while disapproving of Albicerius as a man of abandoned life, claims that he has demonstrated his supernormal powers in numberless instances extending over many years, though there have also been some failures. The following examples are given. (a) On an occasion when a spoon was missed, Augustine caused Albicerius to be informed simply that some one had lost something. The clairvoyant identified the missing object as a spoon, gave the owner's name, and correctly described the place where it would be found. It is not clear whether the spoon had been mislaid or stolen: on the former supposition the knowledge of its whereabouts might be in the subconscious memory of its owner, and it would be possible to explain the whole incident by telepathy. The sceptic will doubtless assume collusion with servants. We may compare Varro's story<sup>4</sup> of Fabius' consultation of Nigidius Figulus on a similar occasion, when with the aid of certain boys placed under a spell ('*carminē instincti*') Nigidius was able to describe what had happened to a number of missing coins. The employment of professional clairvoyants to discover stolen money is referred to in a fragment of an Atellane by Pomponius.<sup>5</sup> (b) On an occasion when Augustine's friend Licentius was consulting him on another matter, the clairvoyant became mysteriously aware that part of his fee, which was being brought him by a slave, had been abstracted *en route*. The details given are hardly sufficient to establish the supernormal character of this incident. (c) Another friend of Augustine's, one Flaccianus, asked Albicerius as a test question what business he, Flaccianus, had been discussing lately. The

<sup>1</sup> *Civ. Dei* xviii. 18.

<sup>2</sup> *Phantasms of the Living*, chap. xvii; F. Podmore, *Apparitions and Thought-transference* 298 ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Contra Academicos* i. 6 f. (Migne xxxii. 914 f.).

<sup>4</sup> *Apud Apul. Apol.* 42. See below, p. 219.

<sup>5</sup> Ribbeck, *Com. Rom. fragm.*, v. 109. Pomponius may be gibing at Nigidius (Reitzenstein, *Hell. Mysterienreligionen*<sup>3</sup> 236 ff.).

clairvoyant told him correctly that he had been discussing the purchase of an estate, and to his great astonishment gave the name of the estate in question, 'although,' says Augustine, 'the name was so out-of-the-way that Flaccianus could hardly remember it himself.' The possibility of normal sources of information can scarcely be excluded here. (d) The fourth and last case is the strongest. A pupil of Augustine's asked Albicerius to tell him of what he (the pupil) was thinking. Albicerius replied correctly that he was thinking of a line of Vergil, and proceeded promptly and confidently, although he was a man of very slight education, to quote the verse. If this is accurately reported, the sceptic will, I suppose, fall back on the hypothesis of unconscious whispering. It does not appear what methods Albicerius used, or what explanation he himself gave of his remarkable powers. Flaccianus, we are told, used to put them down to the admonition of some 'low-grade spirit,' *abiectissima animula*.

## II. PRECOGNITION

Of all ostensibly supernormal phenomena precognition—defined by Myers as 'knowledge of impending events supernormally acquired'<sup>1</sup>—has been in virtually all societies, from the most primitive to the most sophisticated, the most widely accepted in popular belief, and often also in the belief of educated men. Yet of all such phenomena it is probably the one of which it is hardest to give any rational account. The paradox of the situation was recognised in antiquity: Aristotle opens his discussion of the subject with the remark that it is difficult either to ignore the evidence or to believe it.<sup>2</sup> Ostensible precognitions formed part of the accepted matter of history: the pages of nearly all ancient historians, from Herodotus to Ammianus Marcellinus, are full of omens, oracles or precognitive dreams or visions. Yet how can an event in an as yet non-existent future causally determine an event in the present? This was already for Cicero, and even for his credulous brother Quintus, the *magna quaestio*,<sup>3</sup> as it still is to-day.

Modern theories of precognition mostly fall into one or other of three broad categories. They attempt to evade or attenuate the paradox either (a) by juggling with the concept of time (Dunne, Saltmarsh, etc.); or (b) by trying where possible to reinterpret the

<sup>1</sup> Glossary to *Human Personality*. On the difficulties of exact definition see C. D. Broad, 'The nature of "precognition"', in *Science and ESP*, ed. J. R. Smythies (1967), 180-6.

<sup>2</sup> *de div. p. somn.* 462 b 12.

<sup>3</sup> *de div.* i. 117.

phenomenon in terms of unconscious inference from supernormally acquired knowledge of the present (Broad, Dobbs, Stevenson, etc.); or (c) by reversing the ostensible causal relationship and treating the precognitive experience as in some normal or supernormal ('psychokinetic') manner the cause of the subsequent event (Tanagras, Roll).<sup>1</sup> Theories of types (b) and (c) had, as we shall see, their counterparts in antiquity. But the majority of men were content with a simpler and more comprehensive explanation: divination in all its forms was the gift of the gods, who are by definition omniscient. This assumption was encouraged by two deeply rooted religious traditions. One was the tradition of Delphi and other oracles where, as we have seen, a god spoke in his own person to men, using the vocal organs of an entranced medium, and advised<sup>2</sup> them on their future conduct in the light of divine foreknowledge. The other was the even older tradition of the oracular godsent dream, essentially a theophany in sleep, which the Greeks had taken over very early from their eastern neighbours. The dream is, as Plutarch said, 'the oldest oracle'.<sup>3</sup> Here too men saw a direct message from the divine world, to be recognised 'when in sleep the dreamer's parent, or some other respected or impressive personage, perhaps a priest or even a god, reveals without symbolism what will or will not happen, or should or should not be done.'<sup>4</sup> These special messages, most often vouchsafed to kings, priests, wise men or other peculiarly qualified dreamers,<sup>5</sup> were *en clair*. But side by side with them there were the much commoner symbolic dreams whose prophetic significance could be discovered only with the help of a professional

<sup>1</sup> On these speculations see Broad, *op. cit.* 165-96, and more briefly Ian Stevenson, 'Precognition of Disasters', *Journ. Amer. S.P.R.* 64 (1970) 194-6.

<sup>2</sup> The primary function of a Greek oracle was to *advise*, not to predict: Apollo was not a fortune-teller. The questions asked of Delphi in Plutarch's day, 'Should I marry?', 'Should I make the voyage?', 'Should I invest the money?', are probably typical of the average enquirer at all periods, though Plutarch prefers not to think so (*Pyth. orac.* 28). Cf. the extant collection of questions addressed to the oracle at Dodona, mostly datable between 500 and 250 B.C., of which a representative sample are printed and translated by Parke, *The Oracles of Zeus*, Appendix I.

<sup>3</sup> *Sept. sap.* 15.

<sup>4</sup> Macrobius, in *Somn. Scip.* i. 3. 8. I have discussed such dreams in my *Greeks and the Irrational*, 107-10.

<sup>5</sup> In early Mesopotamia only priests were thus privileged (A. L. Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East*, *Trans. Amer. Philos. Soc.*, NS 46, 1956, 222, 224, 240). For the privileged position of kings cf. *Iliad* ii. 80-82; for wise men, the oracular dreams granted to Socrates (and the Stoic theory that only the dreams of the *sapiens* always come true). In later times such divine message-dreams are more commonly claimed by private persons: see Plato, *Laws* 909 E-910 A; *Epin.* 985 C; and for the abundant inscriptional evidence A. D. Nock, *J.H.S.* 45 (1925) 96 ff. The 95 contemporary dreams harvested in Artemidorus' Fifth Book include 9 in which gods (mostly healing deities) appear to the dreamer.

interpreter, an *oneirocrit*, as well as the ordinary non-significant<sup>1</sup> dream which merely reflected daytime residues.

In Egypt such *oneirocrits* had long been part of the official establishment, functioning as priests in the 'House of Life'; so high was their reputation that Esarhaddon in the seventh century B.C. thought it worth while to kidnap some of them and transport them to Assyria,<sup>2</sup> very much as the Russians kidnapped German scientists in 1945. We have parts of an Egyptian dreambook whose contents may go back to a date early in the second millennium;<sup>3</sup> and Esarhaddon's successor Assurbanipal had in his library a dreambook which has recently been published and translated by Oppenheim.<sup>4</sup> In Greece we have testimony to the existence of *oneirocrits* both in the world described by Homer and in fifth-century Athens,<sup>5</sup> and the earliest known Greek dreambook, that of Antiphon, dates from the fifth or the fourth century B.C.<sup>6</sup> His book is lost, as are most of the many which followed it, but we still have the *Oneirocritica* of Artemidorus (second century A.D.), not to mention the Byzantine dreambook of Achmes. Their 'science' rested largely on a gradual accumulation of alleged cases which were copied from one textbook into the next, usually without names, dates or other distinguishing details, thus eventually building up a vast body of 'case law'. But this empirical case law was supplemented by some genuine though limited understanding of the nature of dream symbolism: Artemidorus appreciates, for example, the part played in it by punning associations.<sup>7</sup> Such books necessarily depend on the assumption (which Freud was to share) that dream symbols have in general a standard meaning common to all or most members of a given society<sup>8</sup> or even to the

<sup>1</sup> The distinction between veridical and non-veridical dreams is as old as Homer (*Odyssey* 19. 560 ff.); that the latter are echoes of daylight residues was commonly recognized from Herodotus (7.16 β 2) onwards. One school of experts, however, claimed that *all* dreams would prove meaningful if only we could interpret them (Tert. *de anima* 46. 3).

<sup>2</sup> Oppenheim, *op. cit.* 238.

<sup>3</sup> A. H. Gardiner, *Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum* i.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> *Iliad* 5. 149 f.; Magnes, fragm. 4 Kock; Aristoph. *Vesp.* 52 f.; Xen. *Anab.* 7. 8. 1; Demetrius of Phaleron *apud* Plut. *Aristides* 27.

<sup>6</sup> Diog. Laert. 2. 46 dates him somewhere between Socrates' time and Aristotle's. Against identifying him with the sophist of the same name see *The Greeks and the Irrational* 132, n. 100, and *C. R.* 68 (1954) 94 f.

<sup>7</sup> See 3. 38 on the rôle of significant proper names; 4. 80 on the two senses of *tokos*; and for other examples 1.22 (p. 29. 9 Pack); 4. 22 (p. 257. 13); 5. 70 (p. 318. 8). Punning associations also play a part in the Egyptian and Assyrian dream interpretations (Oppenheim, *op. cit.* 241).

<sup>8</sup> That dream symbolism varies from culture to culture is recognised by Artemidorus (1. 9). Synesius, who was Bishop of Cyrene in the fifth century A.D., went further, holding that it varies from person to person: dreambooks were therefore useless—only by keeping careful records of all one's own dreams could one learn their predictive value (*de insomn.* 12).

whole of mankind: see for example Artemidorus' list of symbols for women,<sup>1</sup> most of which would be acceptable to present-day analysts. But in order to account for variations in the eventual outcome the Greek interpreters (and already to some extent the Assyrian) found themselves forced increasingly to qualify this assumption by allowing the symbols to have different meanings for members of different professions or persons in different situations. Artemidorus carries this device so far that for a dream of being struck by lightning he admits at least fifteen different interpretations.<sup>2</sup> Casuistry of this sort enabled the expert to explain away false predictions—some vital qualification had been overlooked. Artemidorus warns his son against attempting to interpret any dream unless he knows the dreamer's character and circumstances.<sup>3</sup>

While the *oneirocrits* were thus building up their system for the masses, a few men were trying to make some logical sense of the precognitive dream. The initial impulse to this seems to have come from the doctors. 'The best medical opinion,' says Aristotle, 'takes dreams seriously'; and we have confirmation in the Hippocratic writings, where dreams are frequently mentioned as clinical symptoms.<sup>4</sup> One fourth-century writer devoted a whole section of his treatise *On Regimen* (*Περὶ διαίτης*) to a discussion of precognitive dreams,<sup>5</sup> though he does not attempt to cover the entire field; he leaves 'godsent' dreams to the *oneirocrits*, and he also recognizes that most dreams are merely wish-fulfilments.<sup>6</sup> The dreams which interest him as a doctor are those which express in symbolic form morbid physiological states, and thus have predictive value for the physician. These he attributes to a kind of medical clairvoyance exercised by the soul during sleep, when it is able to survey its bodily dwelling without distraction. And on this basis he proceeds to justify many of the traditional interpretations with the help of more or less fanciful analogies between the external world and the human body, macrocosm and microcosm.

Aristotle's interest in the precognition problem was both deeper and wider. His views about it changed considerably in the course of his lifetime.<sup>7</sup> In surviving fragments of early works which are

<sup>1</sup> Preface to Book iv (p. 240. 6 Pack). His list is 'horse, mirror, ship, sea, female animal, articles of female dress, or anything else that symbolizes a woman.'

<sup>2</sup> 2. 9.

<sup>3</sup> 4. 59 (p. 283. 4); cf. 1. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, *de div. per somn.* 463 a 4. For examples see *Epidem.* 1. 10 (vol. II. 670 Littré); *Hum.* 4 (V. 480); *Hebd.* 45 (IX. 460). In particular, anxiety dreams were rightly seen to be significant symptoms of mental trouble, *Morb.* 2. 72 (VII. 110); *Int.* 48 (VII. 286).

<sup>5</sup> Text and French translation in Littré, *Oeuvres d'Hippocrate* vol. VI. 640-63. For the date see W. Jaeger, *Paideia* III. 33 ff.

<sup>6</sup> Godsent dreams, chap. 87 (p. 640); wish-fulfilment, chap. 93 (p. 660), 'dreams about familiar persons or objects express a desire of the soul.'

<sup>7</sup> Cf. W. Jaeger, *Aristotle* (Eng. trans. 1934) 333 f.

now lost he accepts precognition and follows Plato in attributing it to an innate capacity of the soul itself, exercised either when withdrawn from the body in sleep or, more especially, when about to abandon the body in death.<sup>1</sup> In the slightly later *Eudemian Ethics* he traces success in divination to an irrational source which is 'superior to mind and deliberation'; hence the special powers in this direction which, as we have seen, he attributes to 'melancholics'.<sup>2</sup> But when he came to write his short essay *On divination in sleep* he took a more cautious view. He no longer talks of the soul's innate power of divination, and the notion of godsent dreams he explicitly rejects: if the gods wished to communicate knowledge to men they would do it in the daytime, and they would choose the recipients more carefully.<sup>3</sup> Dreams are natural (even animals dream), and Nature is not divine, though both Nature and dreams may be called 'daemonic'.<sup>4</sup> Two classes of dream he accepts as having intelligible predictive value: those predictive of the dreamer's state of health, which can be reasonably explained (as the medical writers had already seen) by the penetration to consciousness of existing symptoms ignored in waking hours; and those which bring about their own fulfilment by suggesting a course of action to the dreamer.<sup>5</sup> Such dreams are internally generated and present no serious problem. There remain, however, veridical dreams about matters too remote in space or time, or too complex, to admit of explanation on these lines, and, in general, those whose fulfilment is completely independent of the dreamer.<sup>6</sup> Here Aristotle becomes hesitant. 'Melancholics' are mentioned again but are no longer assumed to be specially gifted; they are merely persons in whom Nature is exceptionally 'talkative',

<sup>1</sup> Fragm. 10 Rose<sup>3</sup> (= 12a Ross), from the dialogue *On Philosophy*, quoted above, p. 195. Premonitions of the sick were discussed in the still earlier dialogue *Eudemus*. In fragm. 37 Rose<sup>3</sup> (= 1 Ross) Aristotle tells how his friend Eudemus when lying gravely ill predicted not only his own recovery and survival for the following five years but the imminent death of Alexander, tyrant of Phraeae, who was murdered within the next few days. And another fragment of the same work, recently recovered in an Arabic version, describes how a certain Greek king, lying 'in a rapt state betwixt life and death,' predicted with accuracy a number of external events: see R. Walzer, 'Un frammento nuovo di Aristotele,' *Stud. ital. di Filol. Class.* N.S. 14 (1937) 125 ff. For the popular belief in the mantic powers of the dying cf. Plato, *Apol.* 39 c; Xen. *Cyr.* 8. 7. 21; and the many passages from all periods collected by Pease on Cic. *de div.* i. 63.

<sup>2</sup> *Éth. Eud.* 1248 a 29-b 4; see above, p. 195. Plato had already associated divination with the irrational soul, *Tim.* 71 DE.

<sup>3</sup> *de div. per somn.* 464 a 20. These objections are taken over and elaborated by Cicero, *de div.* ii. 126, 129.

<sup>4</sup> 463 b 12 ff. As Freud remarked, the observation has deep truth if correctly understood (*The Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 2).

<sup>5</sup> 463 a 4 ff., 27 ff. These reductive explanations anticipate respectively the modern types (b) and (c).

<sup>6</sup> 464 a 1 ff. See above, p. 195, n. 5a.

prompting all manner of visions, some of which are likely at times to come true. And he proceeds to quote a proverb to the effect that if you shoot often enough you will sometimes make a hit.<sup>1</sup> Yet he is not satisfied that coincidence is a sufficient explanation for all cases. He rejects Democritus' atomist hypothesis, but tentatively suggests a non-atomist theory of wave-borne external stimuli, based on the analogy of disturbances propagated in water or air.<sup>2</sup> (This might account for telepathic or clairvoyant dreams, but seems ill suited to explain precognition, since wave disturbances require an existing agent to initiate them. It looks like a half-hearted adaptation of Democritus' telepathic theory with the atomist presuppositions left out.)

Inconclusive though Aristotle's discussion is, it at least removed the topic firmly from the sphere of religion and attempted to apply to it the criteria of common sense. But with the rise of Stoicism a reaction set in. The Stoics defended the reality of precognition both on empirical and on religious grounds. Holding as they did that the course of events (though not men's subjective attitude towards events) is completely determined, and holding at the same time a resolute belief in divine providence (*pronoia*), they argued on the ground of the former assumption that precognition was possible, and on the ground of the latter that it must occur.<sup>3</sup> These *a priori* conclusions they supported, as I have already mentioned,<sup>4</sup> by extensive collections of cases (now lost, but utilized by Cicero in the first book of his work *On Divination*).

How, then, should precognition be explained? Ominal divination, they held, had an empirical basis: certain causal sequences had been observed in the past and might be expected (though not with certainty) to occur again in the future. Intuitive divination was another matter: certain persons, in sleep or in abnormal states of consciousness, might with divine help supernormally apprehend, not the future event itself, but the nexus of existing causes from which that event will spring, and from this (unconscious?) apprehension might (unconsciously?) infer the event.<sup>5</sup> This is a reductive theory of what I have called type (*b*): it reduces precognition to clairvoyance. It was the more acceptable in antiquity because the ancients believed themselves to live in a finite universe of quite modest dimensions: hence the nexus of present conditions on which the future was thought to depend was for them finite and therefore theoretically knowable in its totality, at least by a god. 'If there were an infinity of worlds,' says Plutarch, 'divination would be impossible.'<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 463 b 15-22.

<sup>3</sup> Cicero, *de div.* i. 125 f.; i. 82.

<sup>5</sup> Cicero, *de div.* i. 126-8.

<sup>2</sup> 464 a 4 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Above, p. 191.

<sup>6</sup> *Def. orac.* 24, 423 c.



A problem which troubled ancient theorists, as it still exercises modern ones,<sup>1</sup> is the possibility of 'intervention', that is to say, of cases where the predicted future is modified as a result of some action prompted by the prediction: as when, for example, some one dreams of being shipwrecked and in consequence cancels his passage on a ship; in the event the ship is wrecked but the dreamer is not involved. That no one can escape his destiny is an assumption illustrated in the folklore of many peoples, including the Greeks (Oedipus is the stock example). But actual behaviour in antiquity did not reflect this assumption. In classical Athens it was customary to 'avert' (*aphosiousthai*) the consequences of an unfavourable dream by prayer or sacrifice, or by the simpler magic of 'washing off' the dream or 'telling it to the sun'.<sup>2</sup> Even the Stoics admitted that it was possible to evade the predicted future by such means (if no intervention were possible, what providential purpose could precognition serve?). This did not, according to them, violate determinism, for the 'precognitive' experience and the resulting intervention were in their view equally determined.<sup>3</sup> To which an Epicurean critic replied that if so, the warning had no value: 'for we shall intervene if fated to do so, and fail to intervene if fated not to, however many prophets have warned us.'<sup>4</sup> The critic seems to have the better of the argument.

To judge by surviving specimens, the empirical evidence on which the Stoics relied was by modern standards of the poorest quality. As Cicero pointed out, much of it consisted of anecdotes attached to famous names—Simonides, Alexander the Great, Hannibal and the like—which were culled from the pages of historians and biographers. '*Quis auctor istorum?*' he asks: 'On what authority do such anecdotes rest?'<sup>5</sup> We shall never know. First-hand ancient reports of precognitive experiences are almost unknown; we seldom have any assurance that the experience was reported before its fulfilment; and the interval between the two

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Louisa E. Rhine, 'Precognition and Intervention,' *Journal of Parapsychology* 19 (1955) 1-34; Ian Stevenson, 'Precognition of Disasters,' *Journ. Amer. S.P.R.* 64 (1970) 187-210.

<sup>2</sup> Prayer and sacrifice, e.g. Aesch. *Pers.* 201 ff.; *Cho.* 31-46; Theophr. *Char.* xvi (xxviii Jebb), every time he has a dream the Superstitious Man runs to the *oneirocrits* to ask what god he should sacrifice to. Washing off the dream, Aristoph. *Ran.* 1338 ff. Telling it to the sun, Soph. *El.* 424 and schol. ad loc.; Eur. *I.T.* 42. Similar protective rituals are prescribed in the Egyptian and Assyrian Dreambooks (cf. Oppenheim, *loc. cit.* 239). Psychologically they are easy to understand, as providing a discharge for anxiety, but logically they seem to imply either that the dream has causative force—as in modern theories of type (c)—or that it expresses a divine intention (which can be reversed); if it were a mere sign of a fixed future there would be no point in annulling it.

<sup>3</sup> Seneca, *Nat. Q.* ii. 37-8 (probably following Chrysippus).

<sup>4</sup> Diogenianus *apud* Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* iv. 3.

<sup>5</sup> *de div.* ii. 135-6; cf. ii. 27.

events is rarely stated. The only instance known to me which satisfies the first two of these elementary conditions (though not the third) is the dream experienced by Cicero during his exile, in which the ghost of Marius (who had himself suffered exile) led him to Marius' temple of Virtus and promised that he should find safety there; it was in this temple that the decree for his recall was later passed. This dream struck the impressionable Quintus as remarkable, but not his harder-headed brother, who sees in it only daytime residues (he had been thinking much about the example set by Marius) plus a chance coincidence of location. But such as it was, it was his sole experience of a 'precognitive' dream.<sup>1</sup> Rather more striking, and doubtless equally genuine, is Quintus Cicero's dream that his brother Marcus was almost drowned when crossing some wide river on horseback—which duly came to pass (how soon, we are not told). This conforms to a standard modern type of 'crisis-dream'. But it too failed to impress the sceptical Marcus, who refuses to see in it more than a natural expression of brotherly anxiety (Freud would have said, of repressed jealousy directed against his more famous and successful brother); coincidence would in his view sufficiently explain the rest.<sup>2</sup>

Little would be gained by enumerating other, less well attested, examples. But it may be of interest to list, for what they are worth, some general points of agreement between ancient and modern testimony.

In the first place, the content of precognitive dreams is in neither case randomly determined: some selective principle is at work. Aristotle remarks that such dreams mostly concern our personal friends, the reason being that we recognize and attend to stimuli (*kineseis*) which originate with them; and modern enquiries confirm his remark if not his reason.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, a disproportionate number of ancient 'precognitions' seem to concern deaths or (like Quintus Cicero's dream) violent accidents, and the same is true to-day. (Modern writers conclude 'that an emotional shock is a factor tending to generate precognitive experiences'—or is it merely that shocking dreams are more often remembered?)<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, some 'precognitive' dreams have distinctive marks by which it is thought they can be recognized. One such mark is recurrence, where the same dream is dreamt more than once by the

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.* i. 59; ii. 140-1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* i. 58; ii. 140.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *de div. per somn.* 464 a 27; cf. Stevenson, *loc. cit.* 200.

<sup>4</sup> 'The themes of precognitive experiences (as of most other spontaneous ESP experiences) are mostly serious and shocking events such as deaths and accidents' (Stevenson, 200). Out of 349 cases examined by Saltmarsh (*Proc. S.P.R.* 42 [1934] 49 ff.) 99 were concerned with deaths (p. 56). Shock as a factor: Stevenson, 201.

same person or (less often) by different persons.<sup>1</sup> Another is often called *enargeia*, the absence of the usual dream symbolism: this was thought to be characteristic of the 'godsent' dream, which normally gave its message *en clair*, and the same is generally true of modern 'precognitive' dreams.<sup>2</sup>

What is perhaps more significant is that in antiquity as to-day intuitive 'precognition' emerged in states of what we should call 'mental dissociation' and only in these: in dreams (much the commonest channel then as now);<sup>3</sup> in waking states ranging from slight distraction<sup>4</sup> to the hallucinations of the dying or the mentally disturbed; and in 'mediumistic' states voluntarily induced. About the last class something has been said in connection with oracles; but since it was often exploited independently of the official oracles and for purposes other than precognition it will be convenient to give it separate treatment.

### III. 'MEDIUMISTIC' AND ALLIED STATES

From the belief that certain mental states are favourable to the emergence of supernormal phenomena it is logically a short step to the deliberate induction of these states. Of the various devices which have been employed to that end in different societies one of the simplest and most widely used is the practice of prolonged staring at a translucent or shining object which enables a minority of persons<sup>5</sup> to see a series of hallucinatory moving pictures 'within'

<sup>1</sup> For dreams recurring to the same dreamer see Aesch. *P.V.* 655; Herodotus vii. 14; Cicero, *de div.* i. 54, 55, 57, etc.; to a different dreamer, Herodotus vii. 15-18 and p. 201 above. For discussion of modern instances, Saltmarsh 57.

<sup>2</sup> For this sense of *enargeia* cf. Aesch. *P.V.* 663, Hdt. 8.77. All save one of the dreams in Homer are *en clair*, as are most of those described by Cicero. Such dreams are called 'theorematic' by Artemidorus (i. 2, p. 4. 22), 'visions' by Macrobius (*in Somn. Scip.* i. 3. 9), and sharply distinguished from ordinary symbolic dreams. Modern precognitive dreams are nearly always *en clair*: Saltmarsh (58) found symbolism in only 5 per cent to 6 per cent, Stevenson (199) in 12½ per cent.

<sup>3</sup> 'The precognitive dream is by far the commonest reported psychic incident at the present time' (D. J. West, *Proc. S.P.R.* 48 [1948] 265); the same was true in antiquity.

<sup>4</sup> We owe to Aristotle the significant observation that precognition occurs when 'the mind is not occupied with thoughts but as it were deserted and completely empty, so that it responds to an (external) stimulus; similarly some 'ecstasies' precognize because their internal stimuli are completely suppressed.' (*de div. per somn.* 464 a 22 ff.). He also recognized that dreams and the hallucinations of the sick have a common cause (*de insomniis* 458 b 25 ff.).

<sup>5</sup> Myers estimated that perhaps one man or woman in twenty can procure hallucinations by scrying, and that of these successful scryers again perhaps one in twenty obtains in this way 'information not attainable by ordinary means' (*Human Personality* i. 237). The ancient and mediaeval use of young boys for the purpose may have somewhat increased the proportion of successes; see below, p. 219. William of Auvergne judged from personal experience that among boy and girl scryers possibly one in seven or one in ten might succeed (Delatte, *Catoptromancie* 30).

the object; it seems to be in effect a method of dreaming without going to sleep or, as Myers put it, 'a random glimpse into inner vision'. In modern Europe it is best known under the name of 'crystal-gazing', but the crystal, though an impressive stage property, is inessential; I know in fact no certain instance of its use before Byzantine times.<sup>1</sup> I shall adopt the old English term 'scrying', which is neutral as to the nature of the translucent object or 'speculum'.

The ancients were acquainted with at least two methods of scrying, which (as Delatte<sup>2</sup> showed) were distinct in origin, although the same sensory automatism underlies both. In one method, for which the term 'catoptromancy' has been coined, the speculum is a mirror. It appears that it was sufficiently familiar in fifth-century Athens to furnish Aristophanes with the material for a joke: in the *Acharnians* Lamachus uses his shield as a mirror after it has been burnished with oil and pretends to see in it the future condemnation of Dicaeopolis for cowardice. The Alexandrian scholars understood this as an allusion to scrying, and I have little doubt that they were right—no other explanation really fits.<sup>3</sup> Later references to catoptromancy are sparse, other methods having come into fashion; but it was known to Iamblichus as an alternative to hydromancy,<sup>4</sup> and it was allegedly used in A.D. 193 by the Emperor Didius Julianus to ascertain his future, employing a mirror 'in which boys with their eyes blindfolded and their heads enchanted are reported to see things'.<sup>5</sup> We also hear of scrying in a

<sup>1</sup> 'Cristallomancy' appears for the first time under that name in Byzantine books of magic (Delatte 174 ff.). It seems that certain gems, credited with magical properties, were used in connection with 'hydromantic' scrying as early as Pliny's time (*N.H.* 37. 73. 3), but whether as the actual speculum is not clear. In the sixth century, however, Damascius saw a holy stone, 'round and whitish,' which was certainly used for scrying: see below, p. 220.

<sup>2</sup> A. Delatte, *La Catoptromancie grecque et ses dérivés* (1932), a work of wide learning to which I am heavily indebted.

<sup>3</sup> *Ach.* 1128 ff. and scholia *ad loc.*; cf. Delatte 133 ff. For the shield used as a mirror cf. Pherecrates, fragm. 145. 11 f. Kock. The *Acharnians* passage seems to be the only solid piece of evidence for scrying in Greek lands before the first century B.C. The well-known red-figure vase in Berlin (Beazley, *A.R.V.* 739. 5) which shows Aegeus consulting the legendary Delphic prophetess Themis has sometimes been interpreted as a scene of hydromancy (A. B. Cook, *Zeus* II. 206, etc.) or of catoptromancy (Delatte 186); but in the absence of any evidence for scrying as a Delphic method I hesitate to give the guess much weight. Cf. P. Amandry, *La Mantique apollinienne à Delphes* 66 ff.

<sup>4</sup> *de myst.* 2. 10 (p. 94. 3 Parthey). Iamblichus thinks both these techniques inferior to his own 'theurgic' methods.

<sup>5</sup> *Historia Augusta, Didius Julianus* 7. The blindfolding (*praeligatis oculis*) has naturally puzzled interpreters: cf. Myers, *Classical Essays* 65; Ganszyniec in Pauly-Wissowa XI. 28, s.v. *κατοπτρομαντεία*; Delatte 140 f. One or two modern scryers have claimed to be able to see visions in total darkness without a speculum; Delatte suggests that this may be the case here, the mirror being a mere symbolic appurtenance. But it seems more likely that the late and careless

mirror suspended over a holy well or spring (thus combining the virtues of mirror-magic with those of water-magic): this was done in Pausanias' day at a spring beside the precinct of Demeter at Patras with the object of foreseeing the course of a patient's malady;<sup>1</sup> it was still practised fairly recently on the island of Andros, for the more cheerful purpose of enabling a young girl to see the image of her future husband.<sup>2</sup>

The alternative and in later times more frequently mentioned method, which ancient authors call indifferently lecanomancy ('divination by bowls') or hydromancy ('divination by water'), used as speculum a simple vessel of water (as some modern scryers have done),<sup>3</sup> with or without the addition of a film of oil. This technique was borrowed, as the ancient writers acknowledge,<sup>4</sup> from the Middle East where it had a long history. It seems to have originated in Babylonia as a purely ominal mode of divination, from the shapes which oil assumes when poured on to the surface of water (like our Hallowe'en divination from melted lead or white of egg poured into water).<sup>5</sup> But concentration on observing the omens will have induced hallucinatory visions in a certain number of subjects, and in course of time more significance was attached to the vision than to the omen. The oil could then be dispensed with, though it was often retained out of respect for tradition or to give increased luminosity. By the time it reached the Greco-Roman world—in the first century B.C. or earlier, probably via Egypt—the transformation of the rite seems to have been complete. This is obviously the case where water alone is used, and we can probably assume it wherever a detailed vision is described. An excellent though late instance is the 'holy woman' known to the philosopher Isidore, who 'would pour clean water into a glass goblet and used to see down in the water inside the goblet phan-

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compiler has misunderstood or misrepresented the source which he is abbreviating: the scryer may well have been blindfolded during the preliminary incantation (to keep him from gazing prematurely), just as his eyes are to be kept closed or covered for a time in the hydromantic rituals prescribed in the Griffith-Thompson demotic papyrus, col. iii. 14 f., xiv. 24, etc. (cf. A. Abt, *Die Apologie des Apuleius von Madaura und die antike Zauberei* [1908] 248 f.).

<sup>1</sup> Paus. vii. 21. 12. The speculum was the mirror, which was not submerged but suspended at water level; but the prophetic virtue was thought to reside in the *pneuma* coming up from the 'truthful' water. Such rituals are parodied by Lucian, *Vera Historia* i. 26. Cf. Halliday, *Greek Divination* 151 ff.; Delatte 135 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Rennell Rodd, *Customs & Lore of Modern Greece* (1892) 185.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Mrs Verrall found a glass of water as effective as a crystal (*Proc. S.P.R.* 8 [1892] 473).

<sup>4</sup> Varro *apud* Aug. *Civ. Dei* vii. 35; Strabo xvi 2. 39; Pliny, *N.H.* 37. 192.

<sup>5</sup> H. Hunger, *Becherwahrung bei den Babyloniern* (diss. Lpz. 1903).

tasms of coming events; and the predictions she made from her vision regularly came to pass.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of the rite was most often precognition, either by direct vision as in the case of the holy woman or by inducing a god or daemon to appear in the speculum and answer questions.<sup>2</sup> Spells for evoking a god in this way are given in the magical papyri; and this is perhaps the explanation of Varro's curiously worded story about the boy who foresaw (and described in a poem of 160 verses!) the future course of the Mithridatic war by watching an image or phantasm (*simulacrum*) of the god Mercury in water.<sup>3</sup> Varro locates the story at Tralles in Caria. Is it pure coincidence that a century later the same little town produced the medical charlatan Thessalus, who has left us a highly coloured account of his search for magical knowledge? The quest brings him to Egyptian Thebes where he meets a priest 'who could procure personal<sup>4</sup> visions by means of a bowl of water'; after ritual fasting the priest obtains for him a vision of Asclepius, who appears seated on his throne (in the bowl of water?) and answers his questions on astrological botany.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Damascius, *vita Isidori*, apud Photius, *Bibl. cod.* 242. 191 (p. 268 Zintzen).

<sup>2</sup> According to Varro (*apud* Aug. *Civ. Dei* vii. 35) the original purpose of hydromancy was 'to see in water the images of gods', and this is the usual aim of the hydromantic spells in the papyri, e.g. *P.G.M.* iv. 161 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Varro *apud* Apuleius, *Apol.* 42. *Simulacrum* is ambiguous: it could refer to an effigy of Mercury engraved on the inside of the bowl or to an hallucinatory image seen in the water by the boy. The former view gets some support from a spell in the Griffith-Thompson demotic papyrus where a figure of Anubis is to be engraved within the bowl (col. xiv, p. 101)—though the surfacing of oil would there make the figure invisible to the sryer. But the second view, which is Abt's, fits Varro's opinion better (see preceding note). The boy's report of what he saw was presumably amplified and versified later by the magician or priest, as was the custom at Delphi and other oracles. (But the whole story may of course be, like so many political oracles, a *vaticinatio post eventum*.)

<sup>4</sup> *αὐτοπτικὴν*: i.e. without using proxy scryers.

<sup>5</sup> Text, ed. H.-V. Friedrich, *Beiträge z. Klass. Philol.*, Heft 28 (1968). Translated and discussed by Festugière, *Revue Biblique* 48 (1939) 45 ff. (cf. also *Rév. d'Hermès* I. 56 ff.). That the author can be identified as Thessalus of Tralles was convincingly argued by Cumont, *Rev. de Phil.* 42 (1918) 85 ff. Much has been made of his 'vision'. Festugière, who takes it as an honest description of a personal experience, thinks it can be explained only by 'hypnotism' or by fraud on the part of the priest; he excludes scrying on the ground that the god is seen seated on an actual material throne. But why is the priest's skill in lecanomancy mentioned if it leads up to nothing in the event? I think we are probably meant to suppose that Thessalus, who is seated opposite the throne, sees it reflected in a bowl of water and then sees a phantasmal Asclepius occupy the phantasmal throne: the sryer employed by Bishop Sophronius (see below, p. 219, n. 3) has a closely similar vision of 'a man seated on a golden throne'. However, this is perhaps (with all respect to Festugière's great authority) a pseudo-problem. The purpose of Thessalus' 'vision' is after all to lend supernatural confirmation to a collection of astrobotanical lore—a type of pious fiction of which later antiquity offers numerous examples. In some MSS, for greater authority, the part of Thessalus is played by Asclepius himself and that of Asclepius by Hermes Trismegistus.

Scrying was practised under the aegis of religion. We possess the epitaph from the year A.D. 129 of a priest of Dionysus at Salonica who was also an official 'hydroscoapist' or scryer.<sup>1</sup> The magician in 'Thessalus' story is likewise a priest; the 'vision' is preceded by ritual fasting and incantations and is described with all the solemn trappings of a theophany. But similar methods could also be employed for less exalted purposes. Varro's contemporary Nigidius Figulus, a Neopythagorean much addicted to magical practices, used incantations to enable certain boys to discover, probably by scrying, the whereabouts of a missing sum of money.<sup>2</sup> So too a Christian dignitary, Sophronius, Bishop of Tella, was accused in the year 449 of scrying to discover the identity of a thief.<sup>3</sup> And we even hear of a Christian charioteer who consulted the monk Hilarion as to the reason for his ill success in the games; the monk caused him to scry in a cup of water, where he perceived that his chariots were 'bound' (*dedemenoi*) by a spell which his opponents had cast.<sup>4</sup> In this sphere as in others the advent of Christianity failed to abolish pagan practices, as is clear from the later history of scrying, both at Byzantium and in the mediaeval West.<sup>5</sup>

Some features of the ancient usage are deserving of notice. In the first place, where the scrying is done by proxy, the proxy, both in antiquity and in the Middle Ages, is almost invariably a boy or a team of boys below the age of puberty. The primary reason for this choice is no doubt a ritual one: sexual purity is a common ritual requirement in magical operations. But Apuleius<sup>6</sup> was probably correct in remarking that an *animus puerilis et simplex* is especially suited to this purpose. Piaget has shown that the sharp distinction between fancy and objective vision is slow to develop in children—they see faces in the fire or landscapes in the clouds more readily than adults.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Nilsson, *Geschichte der griech. Religion* II. 509, from Heuzey et Daumet, *Mission arch. de Macédonie* (1876) 280.

<sup>2</sup> Varro *apud* Apul. *Apol.* 42. The method employed is not stated, but the context and the use of 'boys' in the plural make scrying the most probable; Abt's argument to the contrary (p. 251) seems very weak.

<sup>3</sup> See E. Peterson, 'Die Zauber-praktiken eines syrischen Bischofs,' *Miscellanea Pio Paschini* (1948) I. 95 ff., reprinted with additions in his *Frühkirche, Judentum und Gnosis* (1959) 333 ff. The detection of thieves was a frequent motive for scrying in the Middle Ages (cf. Delatte 16, 25, 29, etc.), as also among modern primitives (Andrew Lang, *The Making of Religion* 90 ff.).

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by Casaubon on *Historia Augusta*, *Didius Julianus* 7. But in Jerome's Latin version of the story, *vita Hilarionis* 20, the scrying is omitted: Jerome may not have wished to attribute a pagan practice to his hero.

<sup>5</sup> On scrying in mediaeval and later times see Delatte 13-132 and 154-84; also T. Besterman, *Crystal-gazing* (1924).

<sup>6</sup> Apuleius, *Apol.* 43. Cf. T. Hopfner, 'Die Kinder-Medien in den griechisch-ägyptischen Zauberpapyri,' *Recueil Kondakov* (1926) 65 ff.; A.-J. Festugière, *Révélation d' Hermès* I. 348-50; and below, p. 229.

Secondly, the source of the vision is assumed to be external to the scryer, and its content is largely determined by the contemporary culture-pattern. Most often a single figure is seen, as in the 'godsent' oracular dream, and this figure is taken to be, in Varro's words, 'the image of a god' (or, less frequently, the image of a dead man).<sup>1</sup> The images of contemporary events which have chiefly interested modern students of the subject are relatively seldom reported in antiquity: the clearest case is that of the boy employed by Sophronius, who is said to have had on one occasion a veridical vision of the bishop's son riding out of Constantinople on a black female mule in the company of two other men.<sup>2</sup>

A curious feature is that auditory as well as visual hallucinations are sometimes apparently involved. The papyri promise that a god will appear in the vessel and *answer the enquirer's questions*, as Asclepius does in the narrative of Thessalus. The scrying-stone which Damascius saw uttered 'a sound like a thin whistling', which a priest proceeded to interpret; with this we may compare Psellus' complaint that the spirits which enter the water speak indistinctly on purpose, wishing to leave themselves a loophole in case their predictions prove false.<sup>3</sup> In modern times auditory automatism has occasionally been procured by applying a shell to the ear, but it is very rarely reported as an accompaniment of scrying: I have seen accounts of only two such cases.<sup>4</sup> Here also we should probably make large allowance for the influence of the culture-pattern: the ancient scryer, accustomed to the spoken oracle delivered in the first person and to the oracular 'message-dream', may have expected (and *been* expected) to hear as well as see, and his expectation may on occasion have been rewarded. (It is

<sup>1</sup> Varro *apud* Aug. *Civ. Dei* vii. 35. But Thessalus is offered a choice between a vision of a god or one of a ghost, and a similar option is implied at *P.G.M.* iv 227 and 250. Necromantic scrying is also referred to by Pliny (*N.H.* 37. 73. 192) and in the *Cyramides* (p. 30. 24 Ruelle).

<sup>2</sup> See Peterson, p. 100. It seems that this vision was the outcome of a special ritual: the boy scried first in a pit filled with water and oil, then in white of egg, and the same picture appeared in both media.

<sup>3</sup> *P.G.M.* iv. 227 ff.; Griffith-Thompson pap., col. xiv. 27; Damascius *apud* Photius, *vita Isidori* 203 (p. 276. 22 Zintzen); Psellus, *quaenam sunt Graecorum opiniones de daemonibus* (*Migne Patr. Gr.* 122, 881 B: from Proclus?). It is tempting to include here (with Delatte, 104 n. 4) the famous anecdote in Petronius about the sibyl 'suspended in a bottle' who was questioned by certain boys, 'What is it you want?', and answered 'I want to die' (*Sat.* 48). But Ampelius (8. 16) knows of the bottled sibyl as a temple exhibit, which seems to tell against Delatte's suggestion.

<sup>4</sup> In one of these, the Salis experiment reported by Mrs Henry Sidgwick, *Proc. S.P.R.* 33 (1923) 41 ff., the auditory automatism was provoked by post-hypnotic suggestion. The other is a case published by H. Silberer, *Zentralblatt f. Psychoanalyse* 2 (1911) 383 f., and quoted by Hopfner, 'Kindermedien' 73. On 'shell-hearing' see Myers in *Proc. S.P.R.* 8 (1892) 492-5; and on the problem generally, Delatte 177 f.



perhaps worth adding that Hippolytus includes in his collection of conjuring tricks a device which could be used to fake both visual and auditory automatism: a cauldron of water with a glass bottom is placed over a small skylight, and the scryer, gazing into the cauldron, sees (and perhaps hears?) in its depths certain demons, who are really the magician's accomplices seated in the room below.)<sup>1</sup>

*Spontaneous* auditory automatism appears to have been less frequent in the Greco-Roman world than it was among the Jews. But there is one celebrated exception—the 'daemonic sign' of Socrates. From childhood onwards (as Plato tells us) he was accustomed to hear an admonitory voice which dissuaded him from some intended course of action—often a seemingly trivial action—but never offered positive counsel.<sup>2</sup> The experience, he thought, was all but unparalleled,<sup>3</sup> and he took it seriously, believing the voice to come from a source outside himself which he called 'daemonic' but did not attempt to specify more closely. Whether the voice was fully externalized as an auditory hallucination or reached his consciousness only as an inward monition we are hardly in a position to decide.<sup>4</sup> Later antiquity assumed it to be the voice of an indwelling personal daemon, a sort of guardian angel or spirit guide,<sup>5</sup> but it does not appear that Socrates or his immediate disciples made any such claim (though his accusers may well have understood it so). Nor does it seem from the examples—whether actual or merely typical—which are quoted by Plato and Xenophon that its warnings were based on anything that we should call supernormal precognition; it is only in later works, such as the spurious dialogue *Theages*, that Socrates is represented as making oracular predictions about public events.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hippolytus, *Ref. omn. haer.* (ed. Wendland, G.C.S. vol. xxvi) iv. 35. Cf. Ganschinietz, 'Hippolyts Capitel über die Magier,' *Texte und Untersuchungen* xxxix. Modern use of a similar device is reported by F. Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism* II. 249 f. But conscious fraud seldom plays a part in modern cases.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Apol.* 31 D, 40 A.

<sup>3</sup> Plato, *Rep.* 496 c.

<sup>4</sup> In one place Socrates is made to say 'I seemed to hear a voice' (*Phdr.* 242 B), but this is hardly decisive, and the frequent description of the experience as a 'sign' or 'signal' (*semeion*) perhaps points rather (as Myers thought) to an inward sense of inhibition.

<sup>5</sup> See the lengthy discussions in Plutarch, *gen. Socr.* 20; Apuleius, *de deo Socratis* 17 ff.; Maximus of Tyre, *orat.* viii-ix; Proclus, in *Alc. i*, pp. 78-83 Creuzer; Olympiodorus, in *Alc. i*, pp. 21-3 Creuzer; Hermeias, in *Phaedrum*, pp. 65-9 Couvreur. Olympiodorus actually equates the 'daemon' with the Christian 'guardian angel'. But Hermeias comes nearer to the modern view when he speaks of the daemon as the supra-rational personality which controls the whole of our life, including involuntary functions like dreaming and digestion.

<sup>6</sup> [Plato], *Theages* 128 D ff. The examples given in this dialogue are very different from anything we hear of in the genuine works of Plato; Socrates appears as a sort of 'Wundermann' after the style of Pythagoras. With A. E. Taylor (*Plato, the Man & his Work*<sup>3</sup> 532 ff.) I should incline to attribute the

Auditory and visual automatism have their counterpart in motor automatism, the unconscious muscular action which accounts for the phenomena of automatic writing and drawing, table-tilting and the so-called 'ouija-board'. We do not hear of graphic automatism or jumping tables in antiquity, but we possess a detailed account of a magical operation performed in the year A.D. 371 whose principle was that of the ouija-board.<sup>1</sup> It is for once well attested, being based on the confession of one of the participants, who were subsequently brought to trial for treason. Their instrument, produced in court at the trial, was a tripod of olive wood which supported a circular metal dish on whose rim were engraved the 24 letters of the Greek alphabet. Above the dish the operator held a ring suspended on a very light linen thread. After prolonged incantations, addressed to 'the deity of precognition' (unnamed), 'at last,' says the confession, 'we got the thing to work.'<sup>2</sup> The ring began to swing from letter to letter, picking out words, and eventually spelt out 'hexameter verses appropriate to the questions addressed to it.'<sup>3</sup> Then some one asked the question they had come to ask: 'What man shall be Emperor after Valens?' Slowly the ring started to spell: *theta*, then *epsilon*, then *omikron*. 'Ah,' they said, 'Theodorus!', and went home.<sup>4</sup> But they were mistaken, as the event proved. One of them happened to mention

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*Theages* to the miracle-mongering circle of men like Xenocrates and Heraclides Ponticus. Further apocryphal tales of Socrates' prophetic powers were collected by Antipater; Cicero offers specimens (*de div.* i. 123).

<sup>1</sup> The fullest and most trustworthy account is that given by Ammianus, xxix. 1. 25-32. Other sources include Sozomen vi. 35; Zosimus iv. 13 f.; and Socrates iv. 19.

<sup>2</sup> *movimus tandem*: not, as Andrew Lang understood it, 'we got the tripod to move'—for that would have been irrelevant to the purpose intended—but simply 'we got things going, obtained a result.' The unnamed deity (*numen*) is presumably Apollo, since the *mensula* was constructed 'after the fashion of the Delphic tripod'. The church historian Socrates speaks of necromancy, but by his day the word had lost its specific meaning and become a general term of abuse like the Latin *nigromantia*. The Byzantine writers Zonaras and Cedrenus assume that the letters were picked out by a live cock (electryomancy, a form of ominal divination); their opinion cannot, however, weigh against the contemporary authority of Ammianus.

<sup>3</sup> For responses in verse cf. *P.G.M.* iv. 161 ff. and my *Greeks and the Irrational* 92 f. Ammianus quotes some tolerable Greek hexameters which appear to have been spelt out by the ring. They predict the death of Valens 'when battle rages on the plains of Mimas', and Ammianus later (xxx. 14. 8 f.) reports a claim that the prediction was in the event obliquely confirmed; but this may be merely the gossip of pious pagans, anxious to defend Apollo's veracity.

<sup>4</sup> Some translators, taking *cum adiectione litterae posterae* with what precedes, make the ring spell out THEOD- (as it certainly would have done in a fictitious narrative). But the words make better sense if construed with what follows: the meaning then is that when the ring in its slow progress had got as far as THEO- an impatient sitter supplied the next letter.

the little experiment to a friend—or what he thought was a friend. Soon after, all of them were arrested, tried and executed; and to be on the safe side, though he denied all knowledge of the affair, Theodorus was executed also. Nevertheless it was the ring that had the last laugh. Seven years later Valens was killed. The name of his successor was Theodosius.

Modern experience suggests that the operator at that fatal séance was probably as innocent of conscious fraud as his too inquisitive employers. To the best of my knowledge it is the only certain example of the use by ancient diviners of a ouija-like technique.<sup>1</sup> But the same principle of unconscious muscular pressure may account for the curious belief that certain very holy statues when carried on the shoulders of priests or other ritually pure persons guided their involuntary movements and thus gave oracular responses by signs in place of speech. This was from an early date the practice at the Egyptian oracle of Zeus Ammon, where a corps of 80 priests carried in procession an ancient wooden statue, 'moving involuntarily (*αὐτομάτως*) wherever the god's will directs their course'. Diodorus says this was a unique oracular method, but Macrobius records a similar procedure at Baalbek (Heliopolis) with a statue of Egyptian provenance: there the bearers 'are moved by the divine spirit, not of their own volition, but carry the statue wherever the god propels it.' Macrobius further cites as a parallel 'the oracular moving statues of the Fortunes which we see at Antium'. But the technique no doubt had its origin in Egypt.<sup>2</sup>

One other form of automatism remains to be discussed—automatic speech. This involves a much more profound degree of dissociation than the types so far considered, and has correspondingly made a much deeper impression on the popular

<sup>1</sup> Marinus' statement that Proclus 'tested the divinatory power of the tripod' (*vit. Procli* 28) does not necessarily refer to an experiment of this kind: the magical papyri prescribe the use of tripods for a wide variety of operations. Richard Wünsch compared the table of divination found at Pergamon (*Antikes Zaubergerät aus Pergamon*, 1905). But if Wünsch's explanation of the use of the Pergamene table is correct, the superficial similarities conceal what is, from the modern standpoint, a basic difference: the Pergamene device worked on the principle of a roulette table, not on the principle of a ouija-board; the outcome was determined not by human action, conscious or unconscious, but purely by chance.

<sup>2</sup> Zeus Ammon: Diodorus xvii. 50. 6; Curtius Rufus iv. 7. 23. Baalbek: Macrobius, *Sat.* i. 23. 13; cf. also Lucian (?), *de dea Syria* 36 f., who describes with miraculous embellishments a like practice at Hierapolis. For the Egyptian origin see Parke, *The Oracles of Zeus* 200; for the explanation, R. Vallois, *Rev. des études grecques* 44 (1931) 121–52. A similar belief is held to-day concerning a statue of the Virgin at Salamis. I cannot deal here with the wider topic of animated statues in general, most recently discussed by P. Boyancé in *Rev. Hist. Rel.* (= *Annales du Musée Guimet*) 147 (1955) 189–209.

imagination at all periods. It is often accompanied by bizarre and startling manifestations. A female automatist will suddenly begin to speak in a deep male voice; her bearing, her gestures, her facial expression are abruptly transformed; she speaks of matters quite outside her normal range of interests, and sometimes in a strange language or in a manner quite foreign to her normal character; and when her normal speech is restored she frequently has no memory of what she said.<sup>1</sup> Everything happens, in fact, as if an alien personality had taken a temporary lease of her body and used her vocal organs as its instrument, speaking of itself in the first person and of the automatist in the third. It was inevitable that such phenomena should be taken nearly everywhere at their face value—as they still are by many persons in our own society—and interpreted as cases of possession by an external spirit. And when once possession was accepted as a *vera causa* it was almost equally inevitable that the notion should be extended to cover a wide range of unexplained pathological conditions. In antiquity not only were cases of epilepsy and delusional insanity put down to the intervention of hostile demons, but even such things as sleepwalking and the delirium of high fever were popularly ascribed to the same cause.<sup>2</sup> My concern here, however, is only with those cases of true automatism which are of potential interest to the psychical researcher.

States of 'possession' are everywhere viewed with a mixture of fear, curiosity, repulsion and religious veneration, compounded in proportions which vary with the nature of the symptoms displayed and also with the belief-pattern current in each society. Where the condition is persistent and accompanied by grossly pathological behaviour, the possessing agent is assumed to be an evil spirit and ritual techniques of exorcism are developed—often with the

<sup>1</sup> A wide range of examples, historical and contemporary, will be found in T. K. Oesterreich's still indispensable book, *Possession, demoniacal and other* (1921; Eng. trans. 1930, repr. 1966). J. Beattie and J. Middleton (edd.), *Spirit Mediumship and Society in Africa* (1969), also offer rich comparative material.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Greeks and the Irrational* 65–8, 83–5; and for a fuller treatment the excellent little book of G. Lanata, *Medicina Magica e Religione popolare in Grecia* (1967). It has recently been argued (W. D. Smith, 'So-called possession in pre-Christian Greece,' *T.A.P.A.* 96 [1965] 403–26) that there is no real evidence for a belief in possession in the classical period of Greek literature. And it is certainly true that not every reference to demoniacal 'attacks' (*epibolai*) need be taken as implying such a belief. But as regards 'divine' possession the words *entheos* ('having a god inside one') and *enthousiān*, which were in common use from the fifth century B.C. onwards, and *katechesthai* ('to be occupied by a god', Plato), testify directly to the belief. And the 'god's' use of the first person in Delphic responses would be hard to explain otherwise, even if we had not Plato's explicit statement (whether seriously meant or not) about 'oracle-givers and inspired prophets' that 'it is not they who speak, since their intelligence is not present, but the god himself who speaks to us through them' (*Ion* 534 D).

effect of inducing by suggestion the symptoms they are designed to cure. In antiquity exorcism was practised by Jews, Egyptians and Greeks before it was taken over and institutionalized by the Christians.<sup>1</sup> But where the symptoms are benign, as they normally are in true automatism, the 'possessed' are highly valued as channels of communication with the supernatural world; 'mediumship' is deliberately sought, is ritually controlled and canalized, and in many societies acquires high religious and social importance. The most influential of all Greek religious institutions, the oracle of Delphi, owed that influence entirely to the powers attributed to an entranced woman, the Pythia. The belief almost universally held by pagans and Christians alike, over a period of more than a millennium, that through the lips of the Pythia an alien voice spoke in the first person, cannot be dismissed as a simple product of conscious fraud or even as a *fable convenue*. Nor is the old Stoic explanation by mephitic vapours any longer tenable: there are no vapours at Delphi, and the geologists assure us that there can never have been any.<sup>2</sup> It remains to accept the view to which all analogy points, that the entranced woman was a vocal automatist, what we now call by the question-begging term 'medium'.

Our information about the psychology of the Pythia is regrettably scanty, but what we have is consistent with this view.<sup>3</sup> The onset of trance was induced by such ritual acts as sitting on the god's holy seat, touching his sacred laurel and drinking from a holy spring—all of them actions charged with autosuggestive power. The trance could of course be simulated. But Plutarch tells us of a recent Pythia who on one occasion began to speak in a hoarse voice and throw herself about as if possessed by an evil spirit, then rushed screaming from the sanctuary, and actually died within a few days. He seems to have had this story from one of those present, and if so it is good evidence that as late as the first

<sup>1</sup> For detailed descriptions of Jewish and pagan exorcism see Josephus, *Ant. Jud.* viii. 2. 5, and Philostratus, *vit. Apoll.* iii. 38 and iv. 20; for an Egyptian exorcist formula employing Jewish and Christian *nomina sacra*, *P.G.M.* iv. 1227 ff. Further passages are collected in J. Tambornino's useful book, *De antiquorum daemonismo* (R.G.V.V. vii. 3, 1909), 75 ff. All these texts are relatively late; and it seems likely that the practice of formal exorcism, as distinct from simple rites of purification, only developed *pari passu* with the growing fear of demons which characterized the Roman Imperial Age (cf. W. D. Smith, *op. cit.* 409). On the growth of Christian exorcism see Harnack, *Mission and Expansion of Christianity* (Eng. trans. 1908) I. 125-146, and K. Thraede in *R.A.C.* VII s.v. 'Exorzismus'.

<sup>2</sup> See A. P. Oppé's now classic paper, 'The Chasm at Delphi,' *J.H.S.* 24 (1904) 214 ff.; and P. Armandry's careful discussion, *La Mantique apollonienne à Delphes* (1950), chap. xix.

<sup>3</sup> I have discussed the function of the Pythia more fully in *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 70-75 and 87-93.

century after Christ the trance was at least sometimes genuine.<sup>1</sup>

Again, all our sources testify to the singularity and obscurity of the Pythia's utterances. In her normal personality she was a perfectly ordinary woman who had no special gifts or special knowledge.<sup>2</sup> When she became possessed (*entheos*) she did not 'rave' or foam at the mouth—it was Roman poets like Lucan who first popularized that notion—but she spoke in riddling symbols. Heraclitus<sup>3</sup> remarked that 'the god of Delphi neither declares the truth nor conceals it, but points to it': the Pythia supplied *pointers* which the priests had to interpret and amplify. The same thing could be said of many modern 'trance-mediums'. They speak as a rule quite calmly, but their answers to questions are commonly indirect and frequently cryptic; their communications tend to take the form of a chain of symbolic images, linked by association rather than logic. And behind the stylized diction of extant Delphic responses we can still at times detect traces of their possible origin in just such a mode of speech. Between the Pythia's words and the published response we must indeed allow for an extensive process of interpretation and reshaping, a process which must often have been governed by rational considerations of policy. Nevertheless the famous ambiguity of the responses need not always have been due to the calculating caution of a hard-headed priesthood; it may very well have originated in many cases with the entranced woman on the tripod.

The Pythia was unique in the lofty status accorded to her throughout the Greek world and beyond it, but she was not unique in kind. Plato couples with her 'the priestesses at Dodona' as examples of persons who possess the divine gift of prophecy but can exercise it only in the state of trance (*maneisai*), and adds that there are other instances too familiar to need mention.<sup>4</sup> And if we can trust Aelius Aristides there were still trance mediums at

<sup>1</sup> Plutarch, *def. orac.* 51. There is no reason to doubt the correctness of his report. I have myself seen a medium break down during trance in a somewhat similar way, though without the same fatal results. Changes of voice are characteristic of mediumistic possession, both savage and civilized; and cases of 'demoniac' possession ending in death are reported by Oesterreich, 117 ff., 222 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus* 244 AB; Aelius Aristides, *orat.* 45. 11 Dind. Plutarch describes the Pythia of his own day, whom he knew personally, as a woman of honest upbringing and respectable life, but with little education or experience of the world (*Pyth. orac.* 22). The same is true of some famous modern mediums like Mrs Piper and Mrs Leonard.

<sup>3</sup> Heraclitus, fragm. 93 Diels. Cf. Aesch. *Agam.* 1255; Soph. fragm. 771 Pearson; etc.

<sup>4</sup> *Phaedrus* 244 AB. I cannot agree with Professor Parke (op. cit. 83) in rejecting this explicit testimony: see *Hermathena* 1968, 88 f. If Plato's statement needs support it can be found in Sophocles, fragm. 456 Pearson, where the Dodonaean priestesses are described as *θεοπιψοδοί*, a word which surely implies at least some form of inspired utterance.

Dodona in the second century A.D.; he supplies the interesting information that on awaking 'they know nothing of what they have said', which indicates a relatively deep degree of dissociation.<sup>1</sup> It also appears, from such evidence as we have, that trance mediumship was practised in the Roman Imperial Age, if not earlier, at the two great Apolline oracles of Asiatic Greece, Didyma (sometimes called Branchidae) and Claros. According to Iamblichus the priestess at Didyma after contact with a sacred spring was possessed by the god and predicted the future.<sup>2</sup> For Claros we have in addition the more reliable evidence of Tacitus and Pliny: there the functions of the Pythia were discharged by a priest who after drinking from a sacred spring uttered prophecies in verse, though he was generally (like the Pythia) an unlettered person; his predictions (like those of the Pythia) were, we are told, enigmatic 'as is the way of oracles'.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from the official oracles classical Greece also knew of private persons who possessed or claimed to possess the gift of automatic speech. They were known as 'belly-talkers' (*engastri-muthoi*),<sup>4</sup> since they were believed to have a daemon in their bellies which spoke through their lips and predicted the future. It seems that like modern mediums they spoke in a state of trance, for an old Hippocratic casebook compares the stertorous breathing of a heart patient to that of 'the women called belly-talkers'.<sup>5</sup> The name of one of them, a certain Eurycles, has come down to us, but it does not appear that he was regarded with much reverence: Plato calls him 'that queer fellow (*atopon*)', and Aristophanes uses him as material for a joke.<sup>6</sup> Later ages took such persons more seriously. They went by the more respectful name of 'pythons', and a speaker in Plutarch draws the crucial (and psychologically inescapable) comparison between these private mediums and the Delphic Pythia, though only to reject it.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Aristides, *orat.* 45. 11. He speaks as if this were still true in his own day; and with his lifelong interest in oracles he is unlikely to have relied on pure hearsay.

<sup>2</sup> *de myst.* 3. 11, pp. 123. 12 ff., 127. 3 ff. Parthey.

<sup>3</sup> Tacitus, *Annals* ii 54; Pliny, *N.H.* 2. 106; Iamb. *de myst.* 3. 11, p. 124. 9 ff. It is noteworthy that sacred springs play a part at all three of the major Apolline oracles (the one at Didyma is now inscriptionally attested, Wiegand, *Abh. Berl. Akad.* 1924, Heft 1, p. 22). Was their sacredness the starting point which determined the location of the oracles? Pliny asserts that drinking the spring at Claros shortened the drinker's life, but its waters, which are still available to the curious, appear to be perfectly wholesome.

<sup>4</sup> Mistranslated 'ventriloquists' in many of the older books and in L. S. J.; rightly corrected to 'mediums' in L. S. J. Suppl.

<sup>5</sup> Hipp. *Epid.* 5. 63 (=7. 28). For the stertorous breathing of entranced mediums cf. Amy Tanner, *Studies in Spiritualism* 14.

<sup>6</sup> Plato, *Soph.* 252 c; Aristoph. *Wasps* 1019.

<sup>7</sup> Plutarch, *def. orac.* 9. Clement of Alexandria says they were still esteemed by the masses in his day (*Protrept.* 2).

The 'possession' of both Pythia and pythons was, so far as we know, autosuggestively induced.<sup>1</sup> But in the Egyptian papyri, both Greek and demotic, we find spells by which a magician may induce it. To quote a single Greek example, the great Paris papyrus gives an elaborate recipe for summoning a 'god' to enter into a child or adult and speak through him.<sup>2</sup> The ceremonial culminates in a sevenfold repetition of a magic formula in the medium's ear, after which we are told that the medium will fall down and remain motionless; to awake him, the magician must recite another formula and then make a noise like a dog. What are we to make of this prescription in the light of modern experience? The 'falling down' of the medium has been compared to the falling down of a boy in the house of Apuleius the novelist, which was attributed by Apuleius himself to epilepsy, but by his accusers to magic.<sup>3</sup> The monotonous formulae with their long lists of *nomina sacra* etc. might serve the same purpose of inducing a suitable mood as does the hymn-singing or soft music customary at the beginning of a spiritualist séance; and the sevenfold whispered repetition might have a hypnotic effect (though I can find no clear evidence that 'hypnotic' as distinct from 'mediumistic' states were known in antiquity).<sup>4</sup> It is perhaps more relevant to recall that Mrs Piper, the most celebrated of modern voice-mediums, would at the onset of her trance fall into a state of total unconsciousness in which her body slumped forward and had to be supported.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'It is sometimes asked, how much control has the subject . . . over the onset of his trance? The answer is, about the same control as ordinary people have over falling asleep.' (Beattie & Middleton, *Spirit Mediumship & Society in Africa* 4).

<sup>2</sup> P.G.M. iv. 850-929.

<sup>3</sup> Apuleius, *Apol.* 42. Cf. Abt, op. cit. (p. 216, n. 5 above) 232 ff., and Hopfner, 'Kindermedien' (p. 219 n. 6 above).

<sup>4</sup> Hopfner thought the procedure in the Egyptian spells 'obviously' hypnotic. He compared the experiment described by Aristotle's pupil Clearchus in which a magician with a *ψυχουλκός ῥάβδος* ('magnetic wand') 'drew out' the soul of a sleeping boy, leaving his body inert and insensitive to pain (Proclus, in *Remp.* II. 122. 22 ff. Kroll = Clearchus fragm. 7 Wehrli). We are not, however, told that the boy was in anything other than a natural sleep, and it is in any case very doubtful if the alleged experiment ever took place—it comes from a work of fiction, Clearchus' dialogue *On Sleep*. More suggestive of hypnosis is Apuleius' description (*Apol.* 45) of boys 'lulled to sleep either by the influence of spells or by soothing odours', who lose contact with their surroundings and predict the future 'as though in a kind of stupor' (*velut quodam stupore*).

<sup>5</sup> R. Hodgson, *Proc. S.P.R.* 13 (1898) 397 f. At an earlier stage in her career Mrs Piper showed epileptoid symptoms—convulsive movements and grinding of the teeth—at the beginning of her trance (Mrs Sidgwick, *Proc. S. P. R.* 28 (1915) 206 f.), a fact which may help to explain the frequent confusion in antiquity and the Middle Ages between epilepsy and 'possession'. Psellus similarly speaks of mediums (*κάρουχοι*) who bite their lips and mutter between their teeth (*C.M.A.G.* VI. 164. 18).



But the fullest and most interesting descriptions of mediumistic trance which have come down to us are due to members of the late pagan religious sect who called themselves 'theurgists'—men who not only talked about the gods as theologians did but *acted* upon them. Theurgy,<sup>1</sup> like spiritualism, may be described as magic applied to a religious purpose and resting on supposed revelations of a religious character. Its practitioners were not motivated by scientific curiosity: by using certain magical techniques to establish communication with the Unseen they hoped to secure the salvation of their souls as well as the more immediate benefits resulting from foreknowledge of the future. But as witnesses they have the advantage over the authors of the magical papyri of being educated and thoughtful men who appear to speak, in some cases at least, from personal experience. Their sacred book, the *Chaldaean Oracles*,<sup>2</sup> is unfortunately lost, but numerous fragments of it and descriptions of the rituals based on it are preserved by the later Neoplatonists—Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus and others—and by the Byzantine occultist Michael Psellus (b. 1018), who had access to material that has now perished.

It is clear that the theurgists used mediums and that they had a technique for throwing them into trance, probably by such ritual acts as the putting on of a special dress, which would operate auto-suggestively. The medium is called *docheus*, 'the recipient', or by the older term *katochos*, 'the one who is held down'; the word *meson*, the literal Greek equivalent of the English 'medium', is actually suggested in one place by Iamblichus, but rejected as too presumptuous.<sup>3</sup> Not everybody, says Iamblichus, is a potential medium; the best, he thinks (in agreement with Apuleius), are 'young and rather simple persons'.<sup>4</sup> A distinction is drawn between trance automatism, in which the medium's personality is completely in abeyance, so that a normal person must be present to look after him, and automatism without trance, which the medium can both induce and terminate at will (both types are

<sup>1</sup> I deal here only with those theurgic operations which involve mediumship, and with them only summarily. For a more general account of theurgy and a fuller statement of the ancient evidence I must refer the reader to my paper in *J.R.S.* 37 (1947), reprinted as an appendix to my *Greeks and the Irrational*. On its religious purpose see now A.-J. Festugière, 'Contemplation philosophique et art théurgique chez Proclus,' in *Studi di Storia Religiosa della tarda antichità* (Messina, 1968).

<sup>2</sup> Most of the fragments are collected in W. Kroll's Latin work, *De oraculis chaldaicis* (Breslau, 1894). See also H. Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy* (Cairo, 1956), and my review, *Harv. Theol. Rev.* 54 (1961) 263-73.

<sup>3</sup> Iamblichus, *de myst.* 3. 19.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 3. 24, p. 157. 14 Parthey. Cf. above, p. 219. So too Olympiodorus thought 'young boys & country folk' most apt for mediumship (*in Alc.* 8. 12).

familiar to-day).<sup>1</sup> The symptoms of trance are said to vary widely with different communicating 'gods' and on different occasions: there may be anaesthesia, including insensibility to fire; there may be bodily movement or complete immobility; there may be changes in the quality of the voice.<sup>2</sup> Porphyry tells us that the 'gods' come at first reluctantly, but more easily when they have formed a habit<sup>3</sup>—that is, no doubt, when a trance personality has been built up. He adds a warning about the dangers of mediumship, which is elaborated by Psellus: the medium may be obsessed by 'material spirits', whose intrusion and violent movements the weaker mediums cannot endure.<sup>4</sup> Most of these observations can be paralleled from the classic study of Mrs Piper's trance phenomena by Mrs Henry Sidgwick;<sup>5</sup> the resemblances are too close to be dismissed as accidental.

Of actual mediumistic utterances delivered at private séances, or what purport to be such, a number of specimens have survived. Most of them come, via the church historian Eusebius, from the great collection of so-called 'oracles' made by Porphyry.<sup>6</sup> Some of them afford clear evidence that the state of possession was deliberately induced: for example, one begins 'Serapis, being summoned and housed in a human body, replied as follows.'<sup>7</sup> Often they speak of the medium in the third person, just as modern 'controls' do, and give directions for his comfort or for terminating the trance. 'Close the sitting,' says one of them, 'I am going to speak falsehoods.'<sup>8</sup> In exactly the same way a modern medium exclaims 'I must stop now or I shall say something silly.'

The supernormal phenomena most often associated in antiquity with possession, whether spontaneous or induced, are precognition, clairvoyance, and 'speaking with tongues' (the last especially but not exclusively among Christians).<sup>9</sup> Psellus expresses the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 3. 4, p. 109. 9, and the clearer statement of Psellus, *Scripta Minora* I. 248. 13–30, based on Proclus. Two grades of demoniacal possession are similarly distinguished by Origen, *de princip.* iii. 3. 4. The first type is exemplified in the automatism of Mrs Piper, the second in that of Mrs Coombe-Tennant ('Mrs Willett').

<sup>2</sup> Iamblichus, *de myst.* 3. 4 f.

<sup>3</sup> Porphyry *apud* Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* V. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Porphyry, *loc. cit.*; Psellus, *Scripta Minora* I. 249. 5. Cf. above, p. 225, and below, p. 236 f.

<sup>5</sup> *Proc. S.P.R.* 28 (1915); see especially chap. vi.

<sup>6</sup> *Porphyrii de philosophia ex oraculis haurienda reliquiae*, ed. G. Wolff (1856, repr. 1962). Cf. Myers, 'Greek Oracles,' in Abbott's *Hellenica*, 478 ff.

<sup>7</sup> Porphyry *apud* Firmicus Maternus, *de err. prof. rel.* 13.

<sup>8</sup> Porphyry *apud* Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* VI. 5; cf. *Proc. S.P.R.* 38 (1928) 76.

<sup>9</sup> See E. Lombard, *De la glossolalie chez les premiers chrétiens* (1910). The Delian priestesses who 'could imitate the speech of all men' (Homeric *Hymn to Apollo* 162 ff.) and the inspired priest at the Ptoan oracle in Boeotia who answered a Carian enquirer in his own language (Herodotus viii. 135) seem to be early

general view in his statement that possession may be recognised 'when the subject is deprived of all activity . . . but is moved and guided by another spirit, which utters things outside the subject's knowledge and sometimes predicts future events'.<sup>1</sup> How strong this tradition was is shown by the acceptance of it in an official Catholic document, the *Rituale Romanum*, which to this day cites among the criteria of possession 'the ability to speak or understand an unknown language, and to reveal things distant or hidden'. Some of Porphyry's 'gods' venture upon explicit answers to such questions as 'Will it be a boy or a girl?'<sup>2</sup> This, it may be thought, was risky. But false answers were accounted for by 'bad conditions',<sup>3</sup> or by the disturbed state of the medium's mind or the inopportune intervention of his normal self;<sup>4</sup> or again by the intrusion of a lying spirit who 'jumps in and usurps the place prepared for a higher being'.<sup>5</sup> All these excuses recur in the literature of spiritualism. The last especially must have come readily to hand, since it does not appear that the theurgic communicators ever furnished proofs of their identity (nor is it easy to see how a non-human spirit could provide such proofs).

In addition to revealing past and future through the medium's lips the gods also vouchsafed to the theurgists visible signs of their presence. Sometimes these could be observed only by the operating priest (*kletor*), but on other occasions they could be seen by all who attended the sitting.<sup>6</sup> To these physical phenomena the best-known witness is Iamblichus. He does not give his evidence as lucidly as we could wish, and some writers have built too much on certain of his rather vague phrases. But he appears to allege that there may be dilatation or levitation of the medium's person; that lights may be seen, sometimes by all present, at the moment when the medium is falling into or emerging from trance; and that the operator may see spirit forms entering the medium's body (this last he calls 'the most important sign').<sup>7</sup> These are the

pagan examples: both are described in the same terms as 'a great marvel'. Similar marvels have been ascribed to possessed persons among African primitives (Beattie & Middleton, op. cit. 6, 29, 132, etc.) and to certain modern 'mediums'.

<sup>1</sup> *de operatione daemonum* 14 (Migne, *Patr. Gr.* 122, p. 852).

<sup>2</sup> *apud* Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* VI. 1. The prediction, though attributed to 'Apollo', was apparently based on astrology.

<sup>3</sup> Porphyry *apud* Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* VI. 5; Proclus, in *Remp.* I. 40. 18 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Iamblichus, *de myst.* iii. 7, p. 115. 10 Parthey.

<sup>5</sup> Synesius, *de insomn.* 142 A (*Patr. Gr.* 66, p. 1300); cf. Iamb. *de myst.* iii. 31, p. 177. 12 ff.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Proclus, in *Remp.* II. 167. 15 ff. on visions and voices perceptible only to those qualified by 'hieratic power' or natural aptitude; Psellus, *Expos. Or. Chald.* 1136 D Migne; Bidez in *Mélanges Cumont* 95 ff.

<sup>7</sup> Iamblichus, *de myst.* iii. 5, p. 112. 2; iii. 6, p. 112. 10.

most clearly attested phenomena.<sup>1</sup> To the psychical researcher it is a familiar-sounding list. The apparition of lights, which seems to have been the most frequent phenomenon, is frequent also in the modern séance-room. Levitation and dilatation have been ascribed to the modern mediums Home and Peters. And the 'spirit forms'—which may appear either as shapeless masses or in recognizable shapes<sup>2</sup>—are suggestive, as Hopfner and others have noticed, of the so-called 'ectoplasm' which modern observers claim to have seen emerge from, and return to, the bodies of certain mediums.

The similarities between ancient theurgy and modern spiritualism appear too numerous to be dismissed as pure coincidence. How then should we account for them? Not, I think, by literary tradition or any diffusionist theory. In the middle of the nineteenth century, when spiritualism first arose, little was known about theurgy even by professional scholars, and anyhow the first spiritualists were not learned people—their main or only source-book was the Bible. We seem driven to recognize a case of like causes independently producing like effects. This does not imply that either the causes or the effects were necessarily supernormal. Dissociation is a psychological condition which occurs with varying degrees of intensity in all cultures, from New Guinea to Haiti and from third-century Rome to twentieth-century London. Its causes are not understood, and in the absence of understanding its more extreme symptoms are inevitably taken at their face value and interpreted as signs of possession. The 'possessed' in turn are seen as spokesmen for the supernatural: their utterances acquire religious authority, and for the true believers that authority is confirmed by the experience of symbolic physical phenomena. Lights are of course the most natural of all symbols for that inward illumination which the believer desires and expects.<sup>3</sup> And levitation too has an obvious symbolic value: since

<sup>1</sup> We also hear of 'autophonic' oracles, i.e. what spiritualists call 'the direct voice' (one which dispenses with the use of the medium's vocal organs). Proclus offers a theoretical explanation of such voices, in *Crat.* 77, p. 36. 20 Pasquali. This type of miracle had long been familiar in Jewish religious tradition (cf. Philo, *de decal.* 9). According to Lucian, Alexander of Abonoteichos occasionally reproduced it with the help of a speaking-tube (*Alex.* 26; cf. Hippolytus, *ref. omn. haer.* iv. 28). For a possible but not entirely clear allusion to so-called 'apports' and other physical feats see Iamb. *de myst.* iii. 27, p. 166. 15, and my note, *The Greeks and the Irrational* 311.

<sup>2</sup> Proclus, in *Remp.* I. 110. 28; Psellus, *Expos. Or. Chald.* 1136 c. Modern 'ectoplasm' is said to behave in a similar manner. But whereas the spiritualist values above all the anthropomorphic materialization, the theurgist prefers the unshaped, since gods have no material form.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. W. Beierwaltes, *Lux Intelligibilis* (diss. München, 1957). Several of the spells in the magical papyri also promise lights or luminous apparitions (iv. 692, 1106, etc.), as do the *Chaldaean Oracles* (*apud* Proclus, in *Remp.* I. 111). It

heaven is in the sky or beyond the sky, it is natural that the soul should strain in that direction and natural that it should be thought on occasion to carry the body a little way with it. Hence levitation is everywhere the mark of a very holy man: it has been attributed to Indian fakirs, Jewish rabbis, Christian saints and Moslem mystics.<sup>1</sup> And the believer also longs to see and touch the divine substance. That substance, or a half-material emanation from it,<sup>2</sup> is for the time being housed in the possessed organism, but he can hope to catch a glimpse of it, at least with the spiritual eye, as it enters or leaves the medium's body. We shall understand neither theurgy nor spiritualism if we see them only as superstitious pseudo-sciences and ignore the element of religious experience. Both of them use magical techniques, but both use them in the service of religion.

Close as the parallelism of the two cults is in many ways, it is not exact. For one thing, the feats of 'psychokinesis' (movement of physical objects without contact) which have been attributed to several modern mediums are missing, so far as I know, from the repertoire of the theurgists, unless we so interpret a passing reference to 'tying and untying sacred bonds and opening things locked' (*de myst.* iii. 27, p. 166. 17). Their absence is the more striking since the possibility of such happenings was entertained by other ancient occultists and was linked by them with the state of possession, though not in the spiritualist manner. Thus we are told that the Jewish exorcist Eleazar, when he gave public demon-

should be added that for the lights to be effective the sittings must have taken place in the dark or in near-darkness, and that in these conditions the phenomenon is easy to simulate: Hippolytus proposes a simple if rather hazardous way of doing it (*ref. omn. haer.* iv. 36).

<sup>1</sup> A useful collection of evidence will be found in O. Leroy's book, *La Lévitiation* (1928), though probably few readers will accept his conclusion that *real* levitation is a privilege confined to good Christians. In antiquity levitation was ascribed to Indian sages (Philostratus, *vit. Apoll.* 3. 15); to Iamblichus himself (Eunapius, *vit. soph.* 458. 31 Boissonade); to the theurgist Chrysanthius (*ibid.* 504. 22); and to Jesus (*Acta Johannis* 93). But the practice had its dangers: the Montanist Theodotus, attempting it on an unsound theological basis, fell to the ground and was killed (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 5. 16. 14); Simon Magus in a like situation broke his leg (*Acts of Peter* 32). For the subjective *feeling* of being levitated cf. *P.G.M.* iv. 537 ff.; for the appearance of bodily dilatation in trance, Virg. *Aen.* vi. 49, Ovid, *Fasti* vi. 540.

<sup>2</sup> To the Neoplatonist, as to the spiritualist, the 'materialization' of immaterial beings presented a difficult problem. Porphyry seems to have suggested that the spirit forms were somehow built up by the psychic power of the medium or generated out of matter 'taken from (existing) organisms' (the medium's body, as in spiritualism? or the bodies of sacrificial animals?). Iamblichus rejects this on the ground that the lower cannot generate the higher, *de myst.* iii. 22. Proclus attempts a compromise: what is seen is not the god in person but an emanation from him which is partly divine, partly mortal in character; and even this is seen only with the eyes of the spiritual or astral body in whose existence the Neoplatonists (like some spiritualists) firmly believed (*in Remp.* I. 39. 1 ff.).

strations (as he once did for the Emperor Vespasian), would place close by a cup of water or a footbath and would require the exorcized demon to overturn it in order to prove to the observers that he had really left his victim.<sup>1</sup> A very similar tale is told of Apollonius of Tyana. There the demon, being required to furnish proof of his withdrawal, volunteered to overturn a neighbouring statue and proceeded to do so, whereupon the possessed youth 'awoke as if from sleep, rubbed his eyes,' and resumed his true personality.<sup>2</sup> These questionable anecdotes represent antiquity's nearest approach to experimental psychokinesis. Presumably the theurgists considered such trivial antics beneath the dignity of their gods—who in any case were accustomed to give, not take, orders.

This brings us face to face with the basic difference between theurgy and spiritualism. With all their similarities there is associated one fundamental contrast: what the spiritualists ascribe to the activity of a discarnate human mind the theurgists normally attribute to gods or non-human daemons. In this they agree with the preponderant weight of ancient opinion. The *possibility* of communication with the dead was seldom denied save by Epicureans and sceptics, but the prevalent pattern of belief did not encourage it. On the orthodox pagan view only the unquiet dead—those who had died untimely or by violence, or had failed of due burial—were earthbound and available. And since these were thought to be angry and dangerous spirits, their company was not as a rule desired; those who sought it were suspect of exploiting it for the unholy purpose of magical aggression. Necromancy did exist, not only as a romantic theme in the imagination of poets from the *Odyssey* onwards but also as an occasional practice in real life.<sup>3</sup> But it existed under a cloud, in the face of strong public disapproval and (at least in Roman times) of severe legal penalties.<sup>4</sup> It had no place in religious life<sup>5</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> Josephus, *Ant. Jud.* viii. 2. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Philostratus, *vit. Apoll.* iv. 20. Similar objective proofs were later claimed by Christian exorcists: see Marcus Diaconus, *vita sancti Porphyrii* 61, and *Vitae Patrum*, Migne, *Patr. Lat.* 72. 760. A partial modern parallel may be seen in a case reported by Richet where a 'poltergeist' on two occasions overturns a chair at the request of the investigator (A. R. G. Owen, *Can we explain the Poltergeist?* 331 f.).

<sup>3</sup> For a short account of ancient necromancy see Cumont, *Lux Perpetua* 97-108.

<sup>4</sup> For Roman legislation against necromancy see Mommsen, *Strafrecht* 642, n. 2, and A. A. Barb in *The Conflict between Paganism & Christianity* (ed. Momigliano) 102-111. Plato had already proposed solitary confinement for life as a suitable penalty for those who 'fool many of the living by pretending to raise the dead' (*Laws* 909 b).

<sup>5</sup> The 'oracles of the dead', like the one at which Periander consulted his dead wife Melissa (Hdt. 5. 92), hardly constitute an exception, since they were not necromantic in the ordinary sense. They seem to have been mostly incubation-oracles at which the enquirer hoped to see the dead in a dream. See *The Greeks and the Irrational* 111.

was commonly thought of as a foreign importation.<sup>1</sup> In Cicero's days it seems to have enjoyed a certain vogue in decadent Neopythagorean circles; he mentions two such amateurs.<sup>2</sup> Later we meet it as a charge brought by suspicious emperors against dangerous aristocrats and by hostile historians against wicked emperors,<sup>3</sup> while at the other end of the social scale we hear of charlatans who for a few pence offered to 'raise the ghosts of heroes', i.e. of the dead.<sup>4</sup> The practice was associated, in the popular mind at least, with the digging up of recently buried corpses to obtain power over them, and even with ritual infanticide for a like purpose.<sup>5</sup> It is not surprising that the word 'necromancy' was corrupted in the Middle Ages into 'nigromancy', the Black Art, and became a general term for sorcery: it was already a black art in Imperial Rome.

This picture has little in common with the mild activities of modern spiritualists. Both the motives of the client and the methods of the necromancer are as a rule very different. The most frequent motive seems to have been a desire for power over others or a desire to know the future; a wish to meet 'the loved ones' or a 'scientific' curiosity about the condition of the dead is rarely mentioned.<sup>6</sup> And the techniques of the necromancer, so far as they are known to us,<sup>7</sup> appear to have been purely magical

<sup>1</sup> Necromancy was considered especially as a Persian practice (Pliny, *N.H.* xxx. 14; Strabo xvi. 2. 39; etc.). It was in fact, as Cumont says, endemic throughout the semitic East (*Lux Perpetua* 99). But 'psychagogues' were already known though not much esteemed in fifth-century Greece (Eur. *Alc.* 1128 and schol.; Aristoph. *Birds* 1555).

<sup>2</sup> Appian Claudius Pulcher, *de div.* i. 132, *Tusc.* i. 37; Vatinius, in *Vat.* 14. Cf. the magical experiments of Nigidius, above, p. 219.

<sup>3</sup> Tiberius: Tacitus, *Ann.* 2. 28. Nero: Pliny, *N.H.* xxx. 1. 6; Suetonius, *Nero* 34. 4. Caracalla: Dio Cassius 77.

<sup>4</sup> Celsus *apud* Origen, *c. Celsum* i. 68. Cf. also Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* vii. 13. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Cicero, in *Vat.* 14; Lucan vi. 533 ff.; Servius on *Aeneid* vi. 107; Libanius, *Orat.* i. 98, *Decl.* 41. 7; Chrysostom, *Hom. in Matth.* xxviii, p. 336 B-D Montfaucon. In the great purge of A.D. 359 even visiting a graveyard in the evening was enough to incur a charge of necromancy (Ammianus xix. 12. 14). On the social reasons for the fear of necromancy, and of sorcery in general, in late antiquity see now Peter Brown, 'Sorcery, Demons, and the Rise of Christianity,' in *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations* (ed. Mary Douglas, 1970), a brilliant essay which appeared too late for me to make full use of it.

<sup>6</sup> Nero's abortive effort to appease the ghost of his murdered mother (n. 3 above) hardly qualifies for the former category. The hero of the pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* proposes to consult a necromant 'as if I wanted to enquire into some piece of business, but actually in order to find out whether the soul is immortal' (i. 5). This, however, is pious Christian romance, not real life. More typical is the case of Maximinus, who employed a Sardinian necromancer to 'elicit predictions from the ghosts of the dead' (Ammianus xxviii 1. 1).

<sup>7</sup> About necromantic methods serious writers give us little information; probably they had little to give. We are dependent on a few magical recipes in the papyri and on the sensational but untrustworthy descriptions offered by poets and novelists (Lucan vi. 420-761; Statius, *Theb.* iv. 406 ff.; Apuleius, *Met.* ii. 28-30; Heliodorus vi. 14 ff.).

and compulsive: the dead come unwillingly, because they have to; there is no indication that mediums were employed. The possibility of occasional *spontaneous* possession by the dead was admitted by the theurgists (see below); but outside of theurgy our only witnesses to this possibility, so far as I know, are Jewish and Christian writers. Josephus and Justin<sup>1</sup> maintain that in cases of possession the so-called daemonic agents are really the spirits of the wicked dead, but Justin admits that this is not the general assumption; everybody, he says, calls the possessed 'demoniacs' (*daimonioleptous*). Tatian and Tertullian,<sup>2</sup> like most of the later Fathers, are of the opposite opinion: so-called spirits of the dead are really demons. Under exorcism, says Tertullian, they sometimes give themselves out to be relatives of the possessed, sometimes to be gladiators or beastfighters (persons who have met a violent end), but are later forced to confess their true nature. And he offers the theory that in such cases the agent is that particular 'personal' demon or familiar spirit who haunted the man in question during his lifetime and drove him to his evil end. It is hard to see why this bizarre speculation was introduced if not because the trance intelligence appeared to show supernormal knowledge of events in the life of the person it claimed to be, or at any rate identified itself in some way as being in fact that person. This seems to be as near as we get in antiquity to 'evidence of survival' in the sense familiar to students of Mrs Piper and Mrs Leonard.

Cases of disputed identity—ghost or non-human spirit—were also known to the theurgists.<sup>3</sup> Porphyry in a cautious mood had asked how he was to distinguish the higher ranks of being—gods, archangels, angels,<sup>4</sup> daemons, planetary rulers—from mere 'souls'. To which Iamblichus replies that each class of being has its characteristic appearance, attributes and modes of behaviour, and proceeds to give a lengthy but not very informative list of these distinctive features.<sup>5</sup> He admits, however, that the lower orders of spirits do on occasion simulate the higher. This happens when

<sup>1</sup> Josephus, *Bell. Jud.* vii 6. 3; Justin, *Apol.* i. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Tatian, *adv. Graecos* 16; Tertullian, *de anima* 57.

<sup>3</sup> Confusion on this subject was made easier by the popular belief that privileged human souls might be promoted after death to the status of 'daemon'. The notion is as old as Euripides (*Alc.* 1003); it was widespread in Roman times (Max. Tyr. ix. 6; Apul. *de deo Socratis* 14. 3; etc.) but the theurgists reject it, just as they reject any blurring of the line which separates 'daemons' from 'gods' (Proclus, *in Alc.* i, p. 70 Creuzer).

<sup>4</sup> On pagan (originally Persian) angels and archangels see Cumont, *Rev. hist. des. rel.* 72 (1915) 159–82.

<sup>5</sup> Porphyry's question is quoted by Iamblichus, *de myst.* ii. 3, p. 70. 8. Iamblichus' reply occupies the rest of Book ii. Cf. also Aeneas of Gaza, *Theophrastus*, p. 61 Boissonade.



the operators are ignorant or impure; such operators may even attract to the séance the evil spirits called *antitheoi*.<sup>1</sup> Iamblichus himself is credited with having unmasked a *soi-disant* Apollo, evoked by an Egyptian magician, who was in reality only the ghost of a gladiator.<sup>2</sup> But such cases are exceptional. The theurgist was not interested in demonstrating survival, which he took for granted; his object was to achieve communication with divine beings and by their aid to transcend earthly experience and 'ascend to the intellectual fire'.<sup>3</sup>

In any social group which assigns religious value to 'mediumship' its apparent function is to alleviate the characteristic anxieties of the group in question by neutralizing or 'disproving' any force which threatens it. For the nineteenth-century spiritualists the threat came from the progress of science, which was gradually undermining the authority of the Bible.<sup>4</sup> For the theurgists of the third and fourth centuries it came in part from the progress of Christianity, which was undermining belief in the old gods, in part from the insecurity of a visibly decaying culture, which inspired in pagan and Christian alike an overwhelming need to escape from earthly conditions.<sup>5</sup>

The survey of ostensibly supernormal phenomena in the ancient world which is here offered makes no pretence of completeness; it covers only selected areas of ancient belief and practice. But it has, I hope, served to illustrate both the differences between the ancient and the modern evidence on these matters—differences largely conditioned by the dissimilarity of the cultural background—and also the indications of a possible underlying identity of experience in certain of the happenings described. For the rest, I can still only echo as I did in 1936 the words of Augustine: 'If any one can trace the causes and modes of operation of these visions and divinations and really understand them, I had rather hear his views than be expected to discuss the subject myself.'<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *de myst.* ii. 10, p. 91. 7 ff.; iii. 31, p. 177. 7 ff. The danger of intrusion by these *antitheoi* was known to the Egyptian magicians (*P.G.M.* vii. 634) and also to Heliodorus (iv. 7. 13). They seem to correspond to the *devas* who serve Ahriman, the Persian Satan. Cf. W. Bousset in *Arch. f. Rel.* 18 (1915) 135 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Eunapius, *vit. soph.*, p. 473 Boissonade.

<sup>3</sup> Iamblichus, *de myst.* iii. 31, p. 179. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. A. Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research* (1968), chaps. i–iii.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. my *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (1965).

<sup>6</sup> *de Genesi ad litteram* xii. 18.